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FOREWORD



Lisa Fitzell
Group Managing Director
Diethelm Travel Group



Darren Ng
Managing Director
TTG Asia Media

DIVE INTO DISTINCT TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

Dear travel trade partners,

Here at Diethelm Travel Group we are again honoured to partner with *TTG Asia* to bring you the annual *Asian Tourism Expert Guide*. This year's feature-rich guide is more valuable than ever before, filled with exclusive travel tips, products and offerings around Asia that are sure to delight you and your clients for years to come.

To provide you with a comprehensive look at 12 destinations we specialise in throughout Asia, we have created individual country profiles featuring recent product news, insider destination tips from expert views, trip inspiration recommendations from local Diethelm team members, regional best buys and foodie's delight, responsible tourism offerings, and more.

With the continuing trend of seeking truly local experiences while traveling, we have also included a section, *Go Local with Diethelm Distinctive*, showcasing unique, handcrafted itineraries that dive deep into the local culture and community of a place. These offerings provide guests with authentic experiences emphasising local activities and personal connections unavailable anywhere else – true Journeys of a Lifetime.

Again, it is our pleasure to share with you an inside look into the wonderful travel world of Asia and we hope you find this guide an inspiring resource for both you and your clients.

Warm regards,



DELIVERING INSIGHTFUL, CONCISE CONTENT

Dear travel trade partners,

It gives me great pleasure to share with you the eighth edition of the annual *Asian Tourism Expert Guide* presented in a new and easier-to-read format this year.

The content in the 17 key Asian destinations featured in the guide offers insightful and concise information and gives readers easy access to the latest developments in the region and what will be trending in the coming months.

The guide provides invaluable destination information, reported by *TTG Asia's* team of award-winning journalists, so that readers can have their finger on the pulse of the industry.

It is also a pleasure to partner Diethelm Travel Group again. This year, the rich content and insider tips contributed by the group's experts on the ground offer a deeper understanding of what each destination has to offer that is unique and special.

I hope you will continue to find this publication indispensable in the course of doing business in Asia and we welcome your feedback on how we can improve and make the next edition even better.

Email your comments to ttgnewsdesk@ttgasia.com and put ATEG 2015/16 in the subject line.

We look forward to hear from you.

Warmest regards,





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BHUTAN

by Jiratkul Wangsiripaisarn,
Pichamon Sukpanyatham, Phasu Leelaprachakul
and Phatsamon Thongklo-on



Taktshang Monastery © wtolenaars-123RF.com ▲

THINGS TO NOTE

- A possible shift in the inbound mix could lead to a much stronger relative presence of Chinese visitors.
- While scheduled air seat capacity is showing some aggregate growth through 1H2016, it is decreasing from Thailand and Bangladesh. Singapore, Nepal and India however are showing gains through 1H2016 possibly influencing the gateways used for entry into Bhutan.
- On current projections, earnings from tourism could reach US\$90 million by 2016 and break the US\$100 million mark by 2017.
- The projected increase in foreign arrivals each year to 2019 will see a growing need to focus more intently on the balance between cultural preservation and tourism numbers.
- Accommodation is still growing in the three-star category, less so in the four-star and is stagnant in the five-star. With a changing market mix over the next few years, demand might swing away from what is delivered now.

OVERVIEW

Tourism demand in Bhutan has witnessed remarkable development and foreign arrivals grew at an average rate of 17 per cent per annum between 2000 and 2014. This has resulted in an increase in foreign arrivals from 7,600 to 68,000 over that same period.

Early indicators for 1H2015 however show a slightly different picture with a moderation to an overall decrease of nine per cent for 1H2015. It must be recognised however that the data is preliminary and could change once all the data has been verified.

The PATA forecasts of travel demand for Bhutan currently stand at a 16 per cent difference between what was predicted and what has actually occurred in 1H2015 – the actual result is 16 per cent under the predicted arrivals count.

Nevertheless, and assuming the drop in arrivals is only temporary, the expectation remains for around 65,600 foreign arrivals into Bhutan in 2015. Based on current projections, Bhutan is expected to host 95,000 foreign arrivals in 2019.

Even so, the volume of foreign arrivals into Bhutan is dwarfed by the total into South Asia generally giving Bhutan a relative share of foreign inbound arrivals of less than one per cent. While this is slowly improving it



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Takshang Monastery © udeyismail-123RF.com ▲

will be a few years yet before that one per cent hurdle is passed.

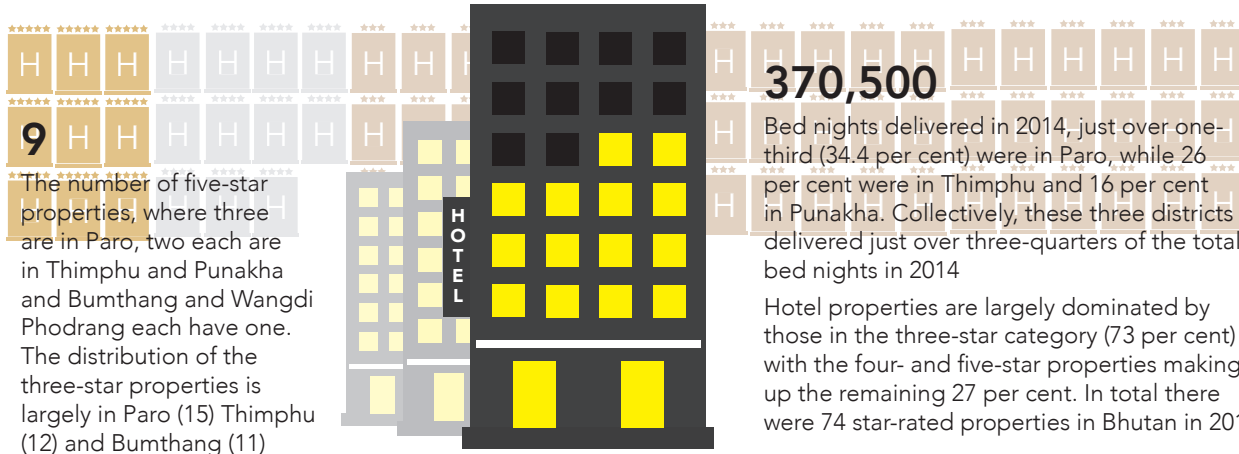
The top five volume growth markets into Bhutan during the 1H2015 are a mixed set with China leading the pack with an incremental increase of more than 2,000 year-on-year, followed by the UK, Taiwan, Sweden and the US all adding increases in the hundreds rather than thousands.

The biggest change in 2Q2015 however was the loss in arrivals from Thailand, Germany, Malaysia, the US and Australia – collectively they reduced their count by almost 2,000, wiping out the gain from China.

The significance here is that Thailand is Bhutan's single largest source market and any major shift away from that will have obvious short-term repercussions. Similarly with the US, which represents about 13 per cent of all foreign arrivals into Bhutan. As already mentioned, China is however expanding and offsetting those losses but shifting the inbound mix in the process.

The visitor profile to Bhutan is also interesting as females (58 per cent) outnumber males (42 per cent) and the largest single age group comprises visitors aged 61 and over. In fact, the 56 and over age group represents more than two-thirds of the foreign arrivals in 2014.

BHUTAN IN NUMBERS



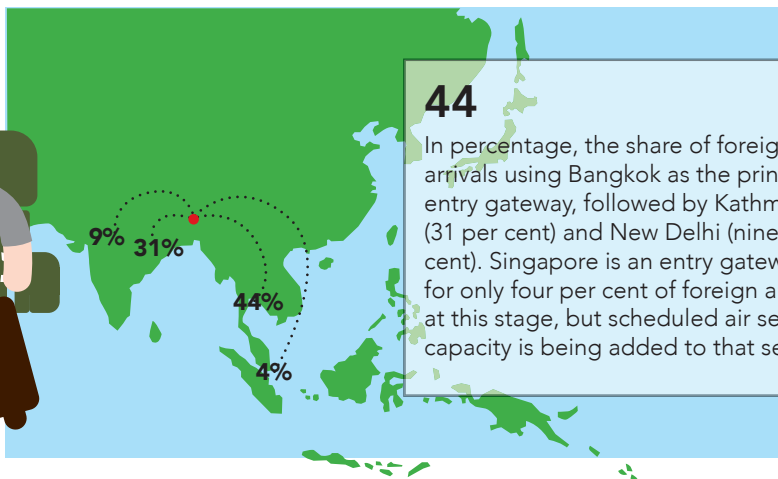
68,100

Visitor arrivals in 2014 and concurrent with that has been an increase in tourism earnings which peaked at US\$73.2 million in 2014



44

In percentage, the share of foreign arrivals using Bangkok as the principal entry gateway, followed by Kathmandu (31 per cent) and New Delhi (nine per cent). Singapore is an entry gateway for only four per cent of foreign arrivals at this stage, but scheduled air seat capacity is being added to that sector



IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“Bhutan is a prime example of where quality is valued above quantity. With a projected average annual growth rate of close to 10 per cent each year until 2020, it will still have to manage the rising number of international visitors, expected to be more than 100,000 annually by 2020.

While the volume of foreign arrivals in 2020 will equate to an average of nearly 13 visitors per 100 residents, the value of that level of visitation will generate the equivalent of US\$17,500 per 100 residents – a valuable contribution but still one that will require careful management.

While Bhutan is not averse to adapting to relevant technology, its primary focus appears to be more on balancing that with environmental sustainability, cultural inheritance and the happiness of its own people.

This is important as Bhutan is a prime example of a country with a unique culture that is proving attractive to foreigners. This experience does come at a cost, and tourists who want to experience Bhutan will have to pay a daily tariff of around US\$250 in accordance with national policy. In itself this is a very interesting example of working to a Return on Asset principle where the consumption of the assets of Bhutan – sights, sounds, experiences – come with a monetary exchange that in one way or another returns to the very owners of those assets – the people of Bhutan.

Bhutan has long rejected GDP as the single and only measure of progress. In its place Bhutan measures prosperity through formal principles of gross national happiness and the spiritual, physical, and social health of its people and its environment.

Remembering that Bhutan has only relatively recently opened its borders to the world, the steady increase in visitor numbers has been limited but astounding, averaging 17 per cent per annum, between 2000 and 2014. Over that same period there have been some shifts in the mix of foreign arrivals also and this is evident in 1H2015.

Western markets are slowly being overshadowed by Asian source markets as they themselves begin to realise the value of Bhutan's natural and cultural assets.

It is certainly expected that Asia will be a key – if not dominant – player in driving Bhutan's tourism economy in future years.

John Koldowski,

member, Tourism Action Group, a specialist unit within the College of Innovation at Thailand's Thammasat University

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Fill up on free sporting action and culture

Anyone seeking the fusion of Bhutan's culture and the thrill of sports needs to pay a visit to Changlimithang Stadium and Archery Ground. It is the sports stadium for soccer and archery with a unique twist. Anyone who plays in this stadium must wear the traditional Bhutan uniform. In addition, the bleachers are only 150m away from the field, so sports lovers can enjoy all the fun in high and close-up definition while experiencing Bhutan's unique culture. An important factor is that there is absolutely no entry fee.

2. Kingdom with power to spare

Bhutan is producing hydropower for its own use, exporting it to India and expects to earn US\$670 million by 2018. Hydropower construction is expected to peak during 2017 as most of the projects under a 10,000MW initiative would then already be under construction. Three projects, Punatsangchu I, II and Mangdechu have a combined capacity of 2,940MW and will be generating about 12,951 million units of energy every year. Around 11,032 million units of power will be available for export.

3. Just what the doctor ordered

The Bhutanese people have been using medicinal hot springs to cure a number of ailments such as arthritis and sinusitis. Tshachus or hot springs can be found all over Bhutan and the better known hot springs include the Gasa Tshachu, Chubu Tshachu, Dur Tshachu, Duenmang Tshachu and Gelephu Tshachu. The hot springs are located in different places across Bhutan and they all provide beautiful scenery, fresh air and a truly relaxing and healthy activity in Bhutan.



▲ Rinpung Dzong in Paro



Masked dancers at Drupchen Festival © anandoart-123RF.com ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

The Bhutan Photo Campaign

The sustainable lifestyle of the Bhutanese people is based on the motto that says happiness is enjoying what you love the most.

For the avid shutterbug, the Bhutan Photo Campaign, an online initiative by the Tourism Council of Bhutan to mark Visit Bhutan 2015, is a fun and enjoyable way to be part of Bhutan's happiness movement through photographs supplied with taglines of up to 40 characters.

Everyone can submit photos taken inside or outside Bhutan to www.happinessisaplace.com.

All photographs are to be submitted by November 4 or December 10, 2015 and will be judged under several categories including the most shares, the most likes and the five best creative taglines.

Prizes include air tickets, Bhutan tour packages, hotel stays, meal vouchers, passes to cultural performances and clubs and spa treatments.

Le Méridien Paro Riverfront

Opened November 2015

Le Méridien Paro Riverfront is a new upmarket hotel located on the banks of the Paro Chu River.

Dusit International

Opening from 2017

Dusit International will introduce its dusitD2 brand to Bhutan's capital city of Thimphu, as well as to scenic Punakha.

The first of these projects, the dusitD2 Thimphu, will launch in 2017 and will be the city's largest hotel with 83 guest rooms and suites.

In 2019, the dusitD2 Punakha – approximately three hours away from Thimphu is scheduled to open. The hotel will offer 53 guestrooms and suites.

Six Senses

Six Senses is present in the kingdom of Bhutan with its resort split across five lodges in Thimphu, Punakha, Gangtey, Bumthang and Paro. The brand is expected to be expanding in 2016.

Punakha Suspension Bridge

The Punakha Suspension Bridge is perfect for visitors looking for excitement, especially when the bridge swings on a windy day.

This is the longest hanging bridge in Bhutan and those daring enough to venture across enjoy spectacular views including the Po Chu river and the surrounding mountains, which provide the perfect photo backdrop, selfies included.

Tourists can also hang their prayer flags on the bridge, which according to the Bhutanese will help in paying respect to the local gods and the spirits of nature.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Drukair — Royal Bhutan Airlines

Tel: (975 8) 271 856

Website: www.drukair.com.bt

Paro International Airport

Tel: (975 8) 271 347

Website: www.dca.gov.bt/AIRPORTS/Paro

Bhutan Tourism Council

Tel: (975 2) 323 251

Website: www.tourism.gov.bt

Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators

Tel: (975 2) 322 862

Website: www.abto.bt

SPOTLIGHT ON BHUTAN



with **DIETHELM TRAVEL**

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

Journey to a place that even the most seasoned travellers consider a deep privilege to visit. With breathtaking mountain scenes, strong Buddhist traditions, an emphasis on happiness and a carefully managed tourism policy, this is Bhutan – or Druk Yul, the Land of the Thunder Dragon – perhaps the world’s last Shangri-La...

PRODUCT NEWS

The vibrant city of Thimpu is made even more attractive with Le Méridien Thimpu, a prestigious hotel located amid a setting full of fascinating contrast. Here, ancient meets modern in a culture that offers historic monasteries, scenic mountain passes, colourful markets, exclusive museums and beautiful outdoor parks. In addition to its iconic mountain vistas, Le Méridien Thimpu features 78 guest rooms with state-of-the-art designs, high-speed Internet, flat-screen TVs, coffee makers, luxurious beds and deluxe bathrooms.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

A day spent at the Royal Botanical Park, also known as the Rhododendron Garden, gives guests a unique look into the flora and fauna found in the kingdom. Just a half-hour drive from Punakha/Wangdue and only 30km from the capital city, the Royal Botanical Park is Lamperi’s most stunning attraction. After visiting nearby sites like the Dochula Pass with 108 stupas and the breathtaking views of the Himalayan mountain range, head to the botanical garden to witness nature in all her glory. Boasting 46 species of rhododendron plants, the garden certainly is worthy of its name.

Fluttering prayer flags wave in the wind as birds chirp and deer feed in the distance. Hundreds of species are

waiting to be spotted in this biodiversity park, where wildlife roams freely and nature flourishes in peace, including pheasants, musk deer, tigers, leopards and even red pandas. The garden also features several spectacular viewpoints, as well as exciting trekking routes, a serene lake and canteen.

With the Diethelm Distinctive excursion, travellers will not only be surrounded by Bhutan’s natural beauty and unique wildlife, but also be privy to expert insight and explanations on what makes this region so special.

I RECOMMEND...

Archery is a classic pastime and the Bhutanese adore this engaging sport. In fact, this national game is played throughout the country in open areas with target ranges between 120m and 150m. Players’ instruments vary depending on the match and tournament: traditional arrows are made from bamboo, while younger players prefer using imported compound bows and arrows. Played between two teams with scoring based on target length, each player is given two arrows to shoot. When players successfully hit the target, their teammates celebrate by dancing. Visitors can join in for a thoroughly local experience.



Ugen Penjor, Managing Director,
Diethelm Travel Bhutan

30 DON'T MISS



- **Paro Tshechu**
March 19-23, 2016
It is one of the most colourful and significant events in Paro Dzongkhag district.
- **Thimphu Tshechu**
October 11-13, 2016
This three-day massive celebration begins on the 10th day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



Bhutan's long-held strategy of controlled tourism, emphasising sustainability and high-quality experiences over mass travel, makes it a unique destination praised for its advances in responsible travel. The Bhutanese are fiercely protective of their country and culture, welcoming international visitors but also maintaining their traditional ways

of life and preserving their land – 60 per cent of the nation's land must remain forested for all time. Because of the government's enforced tourism policies, visitors to Bhutan are already participating in responsible tourism practices. Additionally, excursions from Diethelm Travel Bhutan support local organisations, family homestays and ecotourism initiatives.

BEST BUYS



Known particularly for its textiles and bamboo products, Bhutan provides an exciting array of shops for visitors to discover traditional Bhutanese handicrafts including hand-woven fabrics, *thangkas* (intricate Buddhist paintings), jewellery and organic herbal products. Visitors can also buy souvenirs at the government-run National Handicrafts Emporium located in Thimphu.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



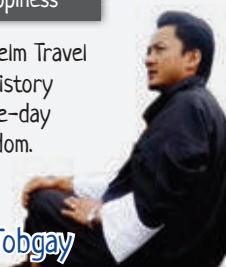
Rice provides the base for most meals. Popular vegetables common in Bhutanese dishes include spinach, pumpkin, turnips, tomatoes, onions and green beans. Beloved restaurants, including The Bhutanese, Cousins Restaurant, Lhayabling Restaurant and Lobesa Restaurant, serve staple dishes such as *ema datshi*, *phaksha paa*, *jasha maru* and red rice.



TRIP INSPIRATION

Journey Through the Land of Happiness

An experienced guide with Diethelm Travel Bhutan, specialising in Bhutan's history and culture, recommends this five-day introduction to the Dragon Kingdom.



Presented by Sonam Tobgay

DAY 1 Thimphu
Visit the **National Museum** and **Rinpung Dzong**, then explore local sights in **Thimphu**, Bhutan's largest city and capital, including **Memorial Chorten**, **Takin Preserve** and **Kuensel Phodrang**.

DAY 2 Thimphu – Punakha
Head to the **Changangkha Temple**, followed by a drive to **Druk Wangyel Chorten** and **Chimi Lhakhang** in Punakha. Believed to bring blessings, the temple is a popular attraction among international visitors.

DAY 3 Punakha – Paro
After breakfast, drive to the beautiful **Punakha Dzong**, or Palace of Great Happiness, and walk to **Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten**. Continue to charming **Paro**, one of Bhutan's greatest treasures.

DAY 4 Paro
Trek to the **Taksang Monastery** on a cliff high above the Paro valley. Explore the ancient ruins of **Drukgyal Dzong** from 1646 and **Kyichu temple**. Relax in a **hot stone water bath** at a local farmhouse.

DAY 5 Paro
After breakfast, your guide will accompany you to the airport as you say farewell to this magical kingdom.

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BRUNEI

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THINGS TO NOTE

- Longhaul tourist arrivals to Brunei are heavily reliant on the political stability in Malaysia and security in Sabah as most visitors to Brunei combine the destination with Malaysia.
- Tourist arrivals to Brunei in 2016 will depend heavily on the national economies of the Asia-Pacific market, which form the bulk of arrivals to the Sultanate. If the ringgit, yuan and rupiah strengthen in 2016, it will have a positive impact on arrivals to the destination.
- Brunei stands to lose out to the development of major tourism products in neighbouring countries such as theme parks being linked with international brands, mega shopping malls and new tourism attractions, unless it also takes the initiative to spice up the visit with more to offer visitors.
- The *GoASEAN TV* series, which will be aired throughout ASEAN in 2016, will help create more awareness about the destination.
- Should there be any contagious airborne epidemic in South-east Asia, travel to Brunei will be affected.

OVERVIEW

The top 10 source markets for Brunei in 1Q2015 were Malaysia, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Australia, the UK, India, Thailand and Japan. These 10 countries accounted for 84.0 per cent, or 53,282, of total tourist arrivals to Brunei.

In 1Q2015, Malaysia, China and Indonesia maintained their respective top three positions in the top 10 generating markets.

Malaysia remains the top destination for Brunei due to easy air accessibility and proximity, while Royal Brunei Airlines' four weekly direct flights to Bali, from July 2014, resulted in a 23.4 per cent increase over 2014.

Royal Brunei Airlines also launched three weekly flights to Ho Chi Minh City, in October 2014, and these flights resulted in a 148 per cent increase, albeit from a low base, in 1Q2015 over 1Q2014.

Comparing the top 10 arrival markets in 1Q2015 with the corresponding period in 2014, only Japan witnessed a drop of 7.5 per cent.

All other markets saw positive growth. Arrivals from the Philippines showed the biggest growth, at 16.51 per cent over 2014.



There is diversity of coral life ▲

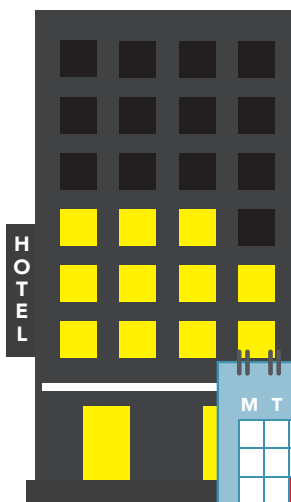
BRUNEI IN NUMBERS



14 | The number of destinations Royal Brunei Airlines operates to in North and South-east Asia, Dubai, Jeddah and London



4 | The number of foreign airlines, namely Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia, MASwings, Cebu Pacific and SilkAir, which operate to the destination in addition to Royal Brunei Airlines

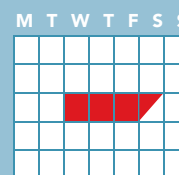


45.8

In percentage, the average occupancy rate

3,648

The total number of rooms in hotels, resorts and apartments



3.5

The average number of days international visitors stay



Arrivals from the UK, Germany, Switzerland and Austria are expected to pick up during the summer holidays this year from June to August.

Most tourists from these European markets will combine a visit to Brunei with Malaysia.

Brunei is very seldom picked as a mono destination for the longhaul markets and they contribute a small share compared with Asia-Pacific, which makes up the bulk of air arrivals to the Sultanate.

In 2016, tourist arrivals from Brunei's top three markets – Malaysia, China and Indonesia – will be heavily reliant on the economic situation in their respective countries.

At press time, the ringgit and Indonesian rupiah were the worst performing ASEAN currencies and this may impact arrivals into Brunei which together with Singapore have the strongest currencies in the region. Similarly, China's economic growth is expected to slow down in 2015 and this may impact arrivals.

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“Safety and security in the region are very important for Brunei’s tourism. Since Sabah is usually the main attraction, I hope there will be no more earthquakes and kidnapping cases in Sabah and that confidence for the destination will be restored. This will benefit Brunei’s tourism with more tourists making a stopover in the Sultanate.

Andy Goh,
general manager, Brunei Hotel

“Freme Travel’s new Eco Adventure Park provides another activity for tourists visiting Brunei. With the rainforest backdrop, tourists can enjoy nature-based activities such as bird watching, fishing and teambuilding activities in a natural environment. We started promoting this park in 2015 and hope to see the fruits of our labour in 2016. I believe this park will be a game changer for Brunei as many tourists seek destinations that can offer back-to-nature activities rather than man-made attractions.

Sugumaran Nair,
inbound manager, Freme Travel

“The ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals will be a game changer for the ASEAN Economic Community once it is implemented in 2016. It will enable mobility of employment for skilled labour of each of the 10 member states. For the hotel industry in South-east Asia, including Brunei, this will help to alleviate the shortage of skilled labour and address the issue of brain drain.



Mohd Iswandi Maaruf,
director of operations, Orchid Garden Hotel

“There is a growing trend among tourists who seek holidays in peaceful destinations with nature-based products. At Sumbiling Eco Village, we provide a comfortable stay with a choice of three rooms in our eco-lodge and five tents. We will increase the number of tents to 10 next year so more people can enjoy glamping. This is a game changer for us as it will allow foreign visitors to stay in Brunei amid nature and we offer an excellent place for outdoor education.

Leslie Chiang,
managing director,
BorneoGuide which operates Sumbiling Eco Village

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Limited taxi fleet

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 06.30 to 18.00. Water taxis are the most common means of transportation at Kampung Ayer.

2. Historic 400-year-old settlement

Kampung Ayer is a must-see destination for all. It is a historic settlement of more than 4,000 houses built on stilts over the 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.

3. Meet the Sultan of Brunei

Foreign visitors will get the opportunity to wish the Sultan of Brunei and members of the Royal Family Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri at Nurul Iman Palace, which is the largest residential palace in the world. The Sultan and members of the Royal Family personally greet and welcome all guests during this festive holiday. In 2016, Hari Raya Aidilfitri falls in early-July.



▲ Brunei Maritime Museum © Jabatan Muzium-Muzium



MV Sentosa (left), Ulu Ulu Resort (centre), Bintudoh Greenspring Resort ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

Brunei Maritime Museum

Opened March 2015

Brunei Maritime Museum, located at Kota Batu, showcases the Sultanate's history as a maritime trade empire and is a repository of the country's maritime history.

The museum is made up of three galleries, namely the Brunei Ship Wreck Gallery, the Brunei Water Vessels Gallery and the Temporary Gallery. The Temporary Gallery showcases the cultural maritime exchanges between China and Brunei. The museum is open from Saturday to Thursday from 09.00 to 17.00.

Bintudoh Greenspring Resort

Opened March 2015

Bintudoh Greenspring Resort in Tutong district, comprises six chalets and a dormitory that fits 14 people. In total, there is accommodation for 26 people.

Facilities include a multi-purpose hall and a café. Guests can enjoy fishing at the fish pond in the resort or take a stroll in the flower garden.

Ulu Ulu Resort

Opened November 2011

Ulu Ulu Resort is the only resort accommodation deep in the 50,000-hectare Batu Apoi forest reserve of the Temburong district of Brunei.

The resort, which lies on the crossing banks of the Temburong and Belalong Rivers, has matured over the years. There are now eight villas offering 17 bedrooms to accommodate 54 guests, a 60-seat cinema/auditorium a 25-seat boardroom and water activities, night jungle walk, a pool room and a tanning deck.

Guests can see the rainforest up close and listen to the sounds of the many species of insects, birds and forest animals.

Trekking to the canopy walk and Sungai Apan Waterfall is rated soft adventure for the reasonably fit as there are steps to climb and some slippery, wet tracks. For a more leisurely experience, guests can kayak up the river, swim or just relax and enjoy the serene surroundings.

MV Sentosa

Launched November 2014

The MV Sentosa provides guests a comfortable option of a river cruise on the Brunei River and to see Kampung Ayer, or the Water Village, up close.

Operated by Sha-Zan Marine, the vessel can accommodate 60 passengers and has fully enclosed air-conditioned decks. It can be chartered for private functions, meetings and trips to Temburong.

Freme Travel's Eco Adventure Park and refurbished Rainforest Lodge

Opened August 2015

Both these new facilities promise exciting activities and all the modern comforts of home in a pristine rainforest environment for overseas tourists and local residents to enjoy.

The lodge can accommodate more than 40 people in new wooden bunker beds and a further 15 or so people can be housed in large tents. In addition, there is a new terrace dining area as well as a new kitchen.

The highlights of the new adventure course includes a 15-metre flying fox, a high rope-bridge course, a hanging bridge across the river, a canopy platform for bird watching and a tower for viewing.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Royal Brunei Airlines

Tel: (673) 221 2222

Website: www.flyroyalbrunei.com

Brunei Tourism

Tel: (673) 238 2822

Website: www.bruneitourism.travel

Association of Travel Agents Brunei

Tel: (673) 223 7935

Website: www.bruneitravelagents.org.bn

Brunei Association of Hotels

Tel: (673) 234 2026

Website: www.hotelsofbrunei.com



CAMBODIA

by Greg Lowe

THINGS TO NOTE

- Given the rising importance of tourists from China, the Chinese economy and any downturn in trade due to domestic issues would have a significant effect on the industry in Cambodia.
- Cambodia needs to build its position as a standalone destination, especially for the lucrative longhaul markets. Some agencies are now selling more tours of the country.
- If talk of low-cost carriers such as AirAsia expanding its footprint within the country bear fruit, then destinations such as Sihanoukville will greatly benefit. Proposed direct flights to India will be another boon.
- Cambodian politics remain a risk. Protests in 2014 dented performance, though many in the trade are hopeful the situation will remain stable at least until elections in 2018.
- New resorts being developed in Sihanoukville will help put the beach destination on the map and attract high-spending tourists from China and other destinations.
- Improvements to National Highway Route 6 will reduce travel time from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap to about six hours, and new high quality coach operations have been launched.

Traditional wooden boat at Sihanoukville ▲

OVERVIEW

Tourism in Cambodia continued to grow steadily over the past year, albeit at a slower rate than the record 24.4 per cent in 2012, and the destination remains on track for another record year although it is expected to fall short of the target of five million arrivals.

While most visitors to the country, especially those from longhaul destinations, do so as part of a wider multi-destination tour of South-east Asia, a growing number of FIT and group tourists are starting to spend more time in the country or view it as a standalone destination in its own right.

Cambodia is also very China-friendly with a number of hotels catering for this market, especially in Siem Reap, and this important number two market grew by almost 22 per cent during 1H2015.

Distribution remains an issue with the vast majority of visitors travelling within the confines of the capital Phnom Penh and the Angkor Wat temple complex at Siem Reap.

Hoteliers say it is also commonplace for visitors to the capital to cut short their stay due to a lack of cultural attractions, with the average leisure guest only chalking up one or two nights.

Phnom Penh's single casino has benefitted from restrictions in Macau, which is funnelling thousands of gamblers, mostly from China, into the city.



A temple at the Angkor Archaeological Park ▲

There have also been positive infrastructure developments. A number of key roads are being improved, notably Route 6 between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

Cambodia Airports is expanding capacity at both Phnom Penh and Siem Reap international airports to five million passengers and to 500,000 at Sihanoukville and the overhaul due to be completed within the first half of next year.

The airport operator is forecasting double-digit growth in 2016.

Sihanoukville, the country's premier beach destination, is also growing in strength.

Marketing activities by tourism authorities and the trade have been instrumental in developing coastal areas in the country. Five new resorts are being built on Otres Beach and are due to open before low season in 2016.

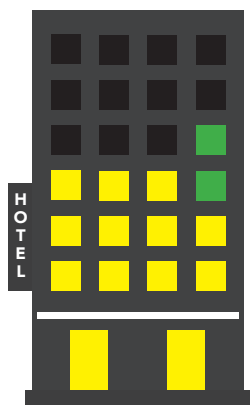
New island resorts including Alila Villas Koh Russey and AKARYN Cambodia Koh Krabey are both due to come online later next year.

While local politics can cause some disruption, matters are expected to remain calm until elections in 2018. As a result, arrivals are expected to continue to grow at the current moderate rate throughout 2016.

CAMBODIA IN NUMBERS

53.6

In percentage, the average occupancy rate of hotels covered by STR Global for 1H2015, up six per cent from the same period a year earlier

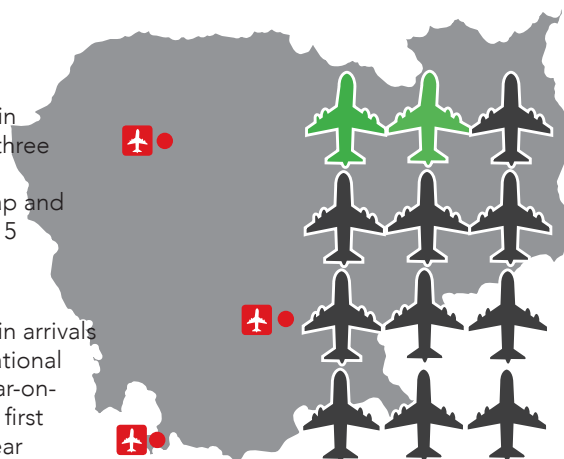


14.8

In percentage, growth in arrivals at Cambodia's three international airports – Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville for 1H2015

142

In percentage, growth in arrivals at Sihanoukville International Airport, the highest year-on-year growth during the first seven months of the year



2.3

In millions, the number of international visitors that came to Cambodia in 1H2015, up 4.6 per cent compared to the same period a year earlier

Vietnam and China remained the top source markets growing from 14.5 per cent to 483,000 and 21.8 per cent to 335,000 respectively in 1H2015

South Korea, one of the destination's key markets, declined 5.8 per cent to 227,910 in 1H2015 compared to the same period the previous year

The US remained the largest longhaul source market with 113,318 arrivals in 1H2015, up 12.1 per cent compared to the same period last year



IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“The 2016 trends for Cambodia should remain positive with the number of visitors continuing to grow. I personally believe growth will stem from business travellers rather than tourists. Phnom Penh should benefit as the city is primarily business oriented. However, Phnom Penh must make a strong and serious effort to clean up the city and ensure safe, fluid traffic on the road.

Charles-Henri Chevet,
area general manager Phokeethra and
general manager Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra

“How individual countries manage their local markets and perceptions will affect visitor arrival. However, it will require a global change of pace to significantly affect Cambodian tourism in 2016. Finally, with the rise of festivals and beyond-temples activities, the rise of the MICE market for international and regional players is a significant trend in market development.

Nick Coffill,
director, Live Media Cambodia/Bambu Stage

“In addition to our expansions at Phnom Penh and Siem Reap airports, more check-in and immigration counters will be added to further ease the flow of passengers, commercial areas will double and new brands will be introduced. Phnom Penh’s domestic flights concourse will also be refurbished and extended in 2016.

Kek Norinda,
director of operations, Orchid Garden Hotel and
communications and PR director, Cambodia Airports

“Despite the slowdown in Europe, due mainly to the US dollar-euro exchange rate, arrivals in Cambodia should remain stable. But the recent problems in Thailand and the drop in arrivals in Vietnam may have an impact. However, the ministry’s marketing campaigns and the setting up of a public-private national committee for tourism development will see more products, increase length of stay and generate more revenue without having to rely on more arrivals.



Edouard George,
advisor to Cambodia’s tourism minister

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Cambodia’s wonder scarf

The krama, a traditional Cambodian scarf with a blue or red checked pattern, is more than a national item of dress or a popular souvenir or gift for tourists.

While typically used as a scarf or headdress, the item allegedly has more than 80 uses ranging from bandana or baby sling to being used as a tow-rope for cars.

2. Motorbikes rule in Phnom Penh

In Phnom Penh, there are as many motorbikes as people, well almost. The capital is reportedly home to 1.5 million people and 1.3 million motorbikes, a fact which can make walking somewhat precarious.

3. New name for Kompong Som

Sihanoukville, the country’s leading beach resort, is named after the revered King Norodom Sihanouk who won the country’s independence from France in 1953. However, the town was originally called Kompong Som when it was constructed in 1956.



▲ A boat tour through the floating forest near Kampong Phluk



Royal Sokha Suite (left), Mango Tree on the River (centre), Phum Baiteng ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

Sokha Phnom Penh Hotel & Residence

Opened March 2015

Located a stone's throw from the Royal Palace on the Chroy Changvar peninsula, Sokha Phnom Penh is one of the city's newest and largest properties.

Catering for higher-end guests, the property boasts 523 keys ranging from the entry level 52m² rooms up to the 318m² Royal Sokha Suite. There is a choice of seven restaurants, including Japanese, Asian, Italian and Chinese, four bars, the Jasmine Spa with 17 treatment rooms, a swimming pool and gym. Wave Club and Stardust Karaoke, which has 36 rooms, provide nighttime entertainment options.

Bambu Stage Siem Reap

Opened December 2014

This cultural project seeks to position Siem Reap as a creative city and combines contemporary music and dance with traditional Cambodian culture.

Bambu Stage provides a platform for both local and international artists to perform together and has collaborated with a number of groups including dance group New Cambodia Artists to produce unique shows.

Shows typically run for about an hour and have a direct connection to the local culture and history, notable with the recent Temples Decoded series of performances. Shows are seasonal.

Phum Baiteng

Opened September 2015

This 45-key property comprises 20 80m² terrace villas and 25 130m² pool villas located a mere 15-minute drive from Siem Reap International Airport.

The luxury resort is notable for its traditional Cambodian architecture and design. Guests can dine at either the international or Asian restaurant and the 50m infinity pool and bar overlooks the gardens and rice paddies.

Phum Baiteng's Spa Temple offers a range of Cambodian wellness therapies in seven treatment rooms, including two double rooms, with other features including a yoga room and relaxation area.

Siem Reap aerial tour

Launched August 2015

Soneva Kiri is a luxury resort located on the Thai island of Koh Kood, just across from the marine border with Cambodia in the Gulf of Thailand. However, the property recently launched a unique Siem Reap excursion, which combines a low-altitude aerial tour (at about 2,500m) of the area famous for its ancient temples.

The journey to the temples takes about an hour and the turboprop runs two scheduled flights each week, although private charters are available with a maximum group size of eight. Highlights include crossing a hanging bridge and visiting a canopy platform for bird watching and a tower for viewing.

MARA

Opened April 2015

The recently opened MARA Restaurant and Lounge adds a new sophisticated dining and entertainment venue to the capital's burgeoning nightlife scene. The bar has become popular thanks to its cosy environment and range of cocktails, fine wines and international beers.

The menu offers a select range of international and Asian dishes such as chilli salt chicken, beef with red ants or tom yum snapper fillet, each of which has been given a contemporary twist. The venue is available for events and group bookings.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Tourism Cambodia

Tel: (855) 2388 4974

Website: www.tourismcambodia.org

Cambodia Airports

Tel: (855 23) 890 890

Website: www.cambodia-airports.aero

Cambodia Angkor Air

Tel: (855 23) 666 6786

Website: www.cambodiaangkorair.com

Cambodia Association of Travel Agents

Tel: (855 23) 212 421

Website: www.catacambodia.com

Cambodia Hotel Association

Tel: (855 77) 966 520

Website: www.cambodiahotelassociation.com.kh



SPOTLIGHT ON CAMBODIA



with

DIETHELM TRAVEL

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

Full of incredible history, beauty, culture and architecture, Cambodia has a magnetic pull that is impossible to ignore. While its famous ancient temples will captivate the imagination and the inner-explorer of all who visit, the warmth and generosity of its people is the country's true treasure.

PRODUCT NEWS

Intriguing new boutique hotels have arrived in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, such as Lynnaya Urban River Resort, Viroth's Hotel, Phum Baitang and Arunreas Hotel, adding impeccable style to these destinations, while exciting sports events are bringing in a new type of traveller.

The Angkor Wat International Half Marathon will celebrate its 20th anniversary on December 6, 2015 and the Ultra Trail Angkor race will be held on January 23, 2016 in Siem Reap.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

One of the best ways to experience a place like a local is to walk it. With the Diethelm Distinctive Half-Day Phnom Bok Hike, guests enjoy a delightful forest walk along the banks of the ancient East Baray. Once a water source for the temples of Angkor, the area is now a fertile plain of paddy fields and sugar palm trees with a charming path meandering through Pradark Pagoda and small villages of traditional wooden stilt houses. Trekkers pass by a lake at the base of the mountain before reaching steps 200m up to a hilltop temple where they can celebrate a job well done, and be rewarded by the amazing scenery watching the sun set over the Siem Reap countryside with a well-earned beer or glass of wine in hand.

Another aspect of the Diethelm Distinctive tours that makes the offerings so unique is drawing on the knowledge and experience of local experts. The Phnom Penh Architecture Tour is led by a Cambodian architect who artfully explains the capital's architectural elements from colonial to modern styles. As guests ride in a tuk-tuk, they are transported through Phnom Penh's central districts essentially time travelling through the city's various architectural periods.

I RECOMMEND...

The famed ruins of Angkor around Siem Reap are the obvious choice for a first-time traveller but soon the visitor will realise that there is much more to see in Cambodia than just temples. I recommend including the capital of Phnom Penh on a first visit and then journeying overland through Battambang to Siem Reap. The country's capital along the Mekong River has a splendid Royal Palace and interesting markets, and only with an overland trip can you get a real taste of Cambodia visiting floating villages and taking a look at local life along Tonle Sap Lake.



*Pierre Jungo, Managing Director,
Diethelm Travel Cambodia*

30 DON'T MISS



- Khmer New Year**
 April 14-16, 2016
 Known as Chaul Chnam Khmer.
- Pchum Ben Festival**
 September 30-October 2, 2016
 This festival culminates in food offerings to deceased relatives.
- Bon Om Thook**
 November 13-15, 2016
 Marking the reversal of the Tonle Sap River, the festival features boat racing across the country.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



A visit to the Banteay Chhmar Homestay is an excellent way to see how responsible travel is working in Cambodia. In 2007, the villagers of Banteay Chhmar formed the Banteay Chhmar Community-Based Tourism Committee dedicated to preserving and protecting the cultural heritage of the area while creating a sustainable tourism industry in Banteay Chhmar.

More than 70 villagers are directly involved as tour guides, cooks, homestay owners, musicians and activity providers. While visiting the Banteay Chhmar Temple is definitely a trip highlight, an even greater experience is the close interaction guests enjoy with the local Khmer people.

BEST BUYS



Held every Saturday, Sunday and Tuesday in front of the Shinta Mani hotel in Siem Reap, the unique Made in Cambodia market brings together examples of craftsmanship in Cambodia. Shop for a cause by purchasing these artisanal products and luxury goods that have each been produced by talented Cambodians.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



While in Cambodia, try local favourites such as clam with tamarind and sweet basil on rock salt, green mango salad with roasted marinated prawns in Cambodian rice paper and beef loklak steak with watercress and Kampot green pepper. Restaurants like Sugar Palm in Phnom Penh and Mahob Khmer Cuisine in Siem Reap serve traditional and innovative Khmer cuisine using only the finest fresh ingredients – simply delicious.



TRIP INSPIRATION

Kingdom of Wonders

A member of Diethelm Travel Cambodia's reservations team shares her favourite recommendations for exploring the country.

With a five-day overland tour between the capital of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, the site of Angkor, travellers are able to experience all different sides of this dynamic country.



Presented by Hor Chenda

Phnom Penh – Kratie

DAY 1

Taste deep-fried spiders in **Skuon**, see charming colonial architecture in **Kompong Cham**, view the rare freshwater Irrawaddy dolphins of the **Mekong River** and stay overnight on the island of **Koh Trong** for a look at rural Cambodia.

Kratie – Steung Treng – Ratanakiri

Reach the remote **Ratanakiri** province, known for its outstanding natural beauty and adventure activities.

DAY 2

Ratanakiri

DAY 3

Visit some of the region's minority people, all with their own languages and customs, along the **Se San River** ending the day with a late afternoon swim in the perfectly round **Yaklaom Lake**.

Ratanakiri – Preah Vihear

Cross the Mekong River and continue to **Tbeng Meanchey**, stopping to visit an impressive silk weaving centre before reaching **Preah Vihear**.

DAY 4

Vihear – Siem Reap

DAY 5

Marvel at one of the most beautiful temples the Khmer Empire ever created, the stunning **Prasat Preah Vihear**, before continuing to **Siem Reap**.

DIETHELM TRAVEL
 JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

Call us at (855 23) 219 151 or
 visit www.diethelmtravel.com





CHINA

by Li Xu



Chinese Guilin landscape © feiyuzhangjie-123RF.com ▲

THINGS TO NOTE

- Since July 2015, Taiwan residents no longer need the visa-like permit to enter China and this may hasten arrivals growth.
- The simplified visa procedures for tour groups between China and Argentina since mid-2015 is expected to contribute to heavier tourist traffic in both directions.
- The marketing campaign for 2016 Visit China Year will be launched in India in response to the 2015 Visit India Year in China.
- Beijing recently announced a three-year project to control regional air pollution together with adjunct cities Langfang and Baoding. Air pollution was the most commonly identified fear in traveller surveys on China conducted in 20 source countries.
- The Air Services Agreement as well as the Free Trade Agreement between China and Australia in 2015 (January and July respectively) are very likely to encourage more Australians to visit China.

OVERVIEW

Unlike the boom in outbound tourism, China has been struggling with its international visitor arrivals. After a flat 2014, China chalked up a 4.6 per cent increase year-on-year for January to July 2015.

There was positive growth of 6.1 per cent from the markets of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

Excluding Greater China, the rest of foreign arrivals declined 1.4 per cent, with Russia suffering a significant drop of 32.2 per cent.

Meanwhile, the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) has identified Vietnam, Indonesia and India as key markets for future growth. Vietnamese visitors to China were up 31.5 per cent during the first seven months of 2015 despite the geopolitical issues. Indonesia and India are considered to have high potential given their large population base and current fast economic development.

Medium and longhaul source markets, namely Europe and North America, are expected to remain weak over the next couple years due to the appreciation (prior to press time) of the Chinese yuan impacting prices of tour packages to China, according to a nationwide travel industry seminar.

While more China branding efforts are highly expected by trade professionals, CNTA is focusing more on nationwide infrastructure and human resource improvements, currently highlighting a three-year Tourist Toilet Improvement Project and the Tour Guide Management Program, which will eventually benefit international tourists.

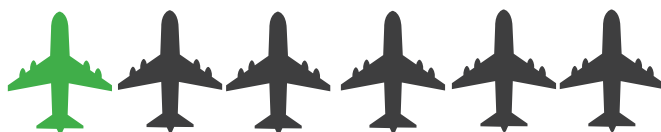
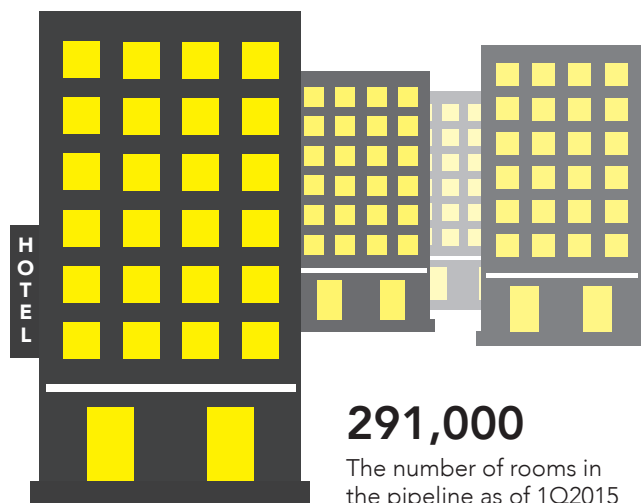
Provincial or city tourism bureaus such as Shaanxi Province and Suzhou City are among those playing more active roles in overseas marketing. Facebook and Twitter are being used to reach out to tourists, and the foreign travel trade is being targeted via search engine optimisation advertisements on platforms such as TripAdvisor and Travelport.

In general, China's inbound tourism figures are not expected to see major improvements for the rest of 2015 and in 2016.



Canton Tower in Guangzhou © FWSAM-123RF.com ▲

CHINA IN NUMBERS



20 | In percentage, the increase in scheduled international air capacity between China and the four countries of Japan, the US, Australia and Canada between October 2015 and July 2016



76.3
In millions, the number of international visitor arrivals from January to July 2015, a drop of 1.4 per cent year-on-year



1,324
In US dollars, the per diem of foreign visitors on average in 1Q2015

19.1
In billion US dollars, tourism revenue generated from foreign arrivals, a drop of 2.1 per cent year-on-year

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“With the recently opened Shanghai National Convention and Exhibition Center and the upcoming Disney Shanghai, we are very optimistic about the international arrivals of both business/MICE and the leisure segments. Exhibitions and conventions organised by the national and Shanghai tourism authorities are very helpful for the hotel sector.

Amane Karazawa,

Director of sales & marketing, Grand Hyatt Shanghai

“The strengthening US economy and currency will bring stronger leisure demand from North America while Latin America will continue its growth path. Meanwhile, we do see more domestic leisure demand than international demand, particularly in second-tier cities such as Chengdu. Overseas travel experiences actually bring more domestic guests who are seeking more intriguing experiences in our properties all over China.



Peter Wynne,

general manager, House Collection

“The traditional players – such as the tour operators that used to be state owned and organise massive groups – are losing ground to the niche players like us because more travellers are seeking private tours. We are seeing a rise of niche players in Shanghai offering unique experiences and quality services. The easing of the Chinese yuan's appreciation may encourage more travellers from the euro zone.

Fabrice de Buhan,

founder and CEO, Culture Shock Tours

“We are expecting more visitors from the participating countries in China's One Belt One Road development strategy. Instead of complete package tours, more and more guests are choosing tailor-made tours or those off-the-beaten path in smaller groups, to have a better experience. The only concern we have is that the air pollution keeps foreigners away from China.



Rebecca He,

PR manager, China Highlights

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Cave dwellers outnumber Australia's population

Over 30 million people in China live in caves and that is more than the population of Australia. The yaodong as the dwellings are called are mostly seen on the Loess Plateau of north-west China like in Shaanxi Province. Cave dwellings can be traced back 4,000 years and are popular for being warm in winter and cool in summer.

2. Pandas are native to China

All pandas in the world are Chinese passport holders, even if they are born overseas. The permanent address for most pandas is the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Sichuan Province. When they travel overseas or return to China, they fly first class. FedEx, for example, operates the Panda Express between China and North America and Europe.

3. The best of times, the worst of times

Chinese New Year can be the greatest time to experience authentic festive celebrations while it is likely to be a nightmare to travel within China as well. Known as *chunyun*, a 40-day period covering before, during, and after, this period bears witness to the world's largest human migration every year. In 2015, a total of 2.8 billion passengers boarding buses, cars, trains, planes, and ferries to reunite with their families.



▲ Xiao long bao is a popular dim sum item



PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

Element Suzhou Science and Technology Town

Opened June 2015

Starwood's first Element Hotel in Asia-Pacific, Element Suzhou Science and Technology Town is located next to a lake in Suzhou's eco-friendly High-Tech District.

The Element brand offers active travellers a smart and sustainable stay, designed to fuel a balanced life.

Three more Element Hotels are opening in China in the coming years: Element Chongli (2017); Element Sanya Haitang Bay (2018); and Element Tianjin Beichen (2019).

Banyan Tree Huangshan

Opened July 2015

The 10th of its brand in China, Banyan Tree Huangshan is located 10 minutes away from the UNESCO World Heritage site and ancient villages of Xidi and Hongcun.

The picturesque resort, featuring the celebrated Banyan Tree Spa and Gallery and conference facilities, offers 76 villas and suites furnished with wooden bamboo carvings and wooden roof slopes with white walls tipped by black scales, finishing in the traditional horse-head style in keeping with the traditional Hui culture in the area.

Alexander+Roberts China by High-Speed Rail

Available April to November 2016

Guests will travel in small groups using the world's most extensive high-speed rail network to visit Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Xi'an for 11 days.

Executive Class on the trains, five-star accommodation, as well as exclusive experiences, such as tai chi Lessons at the Temple of Heaven and dining with a local farmer at a tea plantation, will be arranged.

In ancient times, Mt Huangshan was recognised as the one and only mountain to visit in China. Today, it is a well-known UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage site.

Pure Photo Studio offers a five-day winter tour and 10-day spring tour for photography enthusiasts to explore the magnificent landscape of the mountainous region and immerse in the rich ancient Hui culture in the vicinity.

Shanghai Disney Resort

Opening in 2016

Shanghai Disney Resort, the first Disney resort in China, will feature a number of popular icons.

At Shanghai Disneyland theme park the six themed lands are: Adventure Isle, Gardens of Imagination, Mickey Avenue, Tomorrowland, Treasure Cove and Fantasyland, with the Enchanted Storybook Castle.

The two imaginatively themed hotels – Shanghai Disneyland Hotel and Toy Story Hotel – are conveniently located near the theme park.

Disneytown is an international shopping, dining and entertainment district, adjacent to Shanghai Disneyland and includes the Walt Disney Grand Theatre, which will be home to the first Mandarin production of the Broadway hit Disney's THE LION KING.

Meanwhile, Wishing Star Park has beautiful gardens, a walking path and a glittering lake.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

China National Tourism Administration

Tel: (86 10) 6520 1114

Website: www.en.cnta.gov.cn

China Tourism Association

Tel: (86 10) 6520 1452

Website: www.chinata.com.cn

Air China

Tel: (86 10) 95583

Website: www.airchina.com.cn

Railway Customer Service Center of China

Tel: (86 10) 12306

Website: www.12306.cn



SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA



with **DIETHELM TRAVEL**

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

A vast country replete with beauty, China encompasses a wide variety of landscapes while also being home to myriad cultures and traditions. With one foot planted firmly in its ancient past and the other reaching toward the future, China captivates the senses leaving visitors with a sense of wonder.

PRODUCT NEWS

Diethelm Travel China has designed a new privately arranged visit of Zhuozhenyuan Garden in Suzhou allowing guests to enter the property at 06.30 to experience the grounds transported by an antique rickshaw ride before enjoying a traditional dim sum breakfast accompanied by a live Suzhou opera and musical performance.

Set to launch in 2018, China and Thailand have recently signed a treaty that allows an express railway to be constructed between Kunming and Bangkok. The train will stop at popular locations such as Xishuangbanna (China) and Luang Prabang (Laos), with a total travel time of approximately five hours between Kunming and Bangkok.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

With Diethelm Distinctive, bold travellers are able to thoroughly immerse themselves in a destination and culture with carefully crafted itineraries that centre on local experiences, highlights and hidden gems. Diethelm Travel China's Lost Horizon - Shangri-La tour takes guests deep into Yunnan province to reach the mystical village of Yubeng.

Surrounded by mountains, including Meili Snow Mountain, a sacred peak to the east, the village is home to some of the most breathtaking surroundings in the

region. Gazing out over the valley, it would be easy to think this is a village that time has forgotten. Only 20 families live in Yubeng, living in simple wooden houses and relying on the same traditional way of farming their ancestors have practised for hundreds of years allowing their cattle, sheep and horses to graze freely.

While staying at this secluded, fairytale village, guests have the extraordinary opportunity to journey to Meili Snow Mountain, weather permitting, to witness the spectacular sunrise from the mountain's Kawagarbo Peak. As the highest point in the holy mountain range, the peak has never been conquered by man and is said to be surrounded by a mysterious gold ring – a China dreams are made of.

I RECOMMEND...

Throughout its countryside, Wuyuan in Jiangxi, boasts some of China's best-preserved ancient buildings in the unique Huizhou style. From Qinglin architecture to ancestral halls, the exquisite craftsmanship radiates throughout: traditional shapes, including cornices and angles, highlight this vintage aesthetic. Here visitors can see a special home built in the Sui Dynasty on Zi Yang Street, dubbed the "art treasure house". Wandering on foot is the best way to explore this majestic area in depth, particularly amid the mountains and trees.



Juia Shi,
General Manager,
Diethelm Travel China

30 DON'T MISS



Falling between mid-January and early-February, the Spring Festival is China's most important event. Streets come alive in the day with flowers and colourful lanterns, while loud fireworks light up the night and are believed to ward off monsters and bring good fortune. Authentic cuisine includes dumplings and vegetable soup for good luck.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



In 2008, an 8.5 magnitude earthquake affected millions of lives in China's Sichuan province. As locals continue to recover from this natural disaster, trips to remote regions in the area help boost the economy. Lin Village, for example, is located about 120km from Chengdu along the south-east border of the Wolong Panda Natural Reserve. This legendary village offers visitors a

chance to see pandas in its dense forests. Other treasures include dove trees and traditional wooden houses that provide guests with a comfortable place to stay and also limits their impact on the surrounding environment.

BEST BUYS



White and blue Chinese porcelain known as Qinghuaci is famous around the world and an excellent souvenir. Using cobalt and decorative painting techniques on white porcelain, the pieces are first covered in clear glaze then fired at high temperatures to solidify the pigment into the glaze to create their classic pattern.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



Spring welcomes new growth and reawakening – healthy values that Beijing's vegetarian offerings at Huakaisushi Beijing Restaurant encapsulates. If nature is our primary source of beauty, how can we embody that in our eating habits? A vegetarian diet helps us express our respect for nature as well as our own body and spirit. Not to mention, vegetarianism is better for

the environment. To move toward greater balance and harmony, consider embracing a vegetarian lifestyle.

TRIP INSPIRATION

Mystic of Shambala

A unique way to experience China and Tibet's beauty is by trekking, says a guide with Diethelm Travel China for the past 10 years. She recommends embarking on a remarkable trek along the nomad pathway from Ganden to Samye – perfect for adventurous visitors. Between May and October each year, explore breathtaking alpine landscapes, authentic nomad camps and more hidden gems on this unforgettable walk. Connecting a pair of 5,000-metre passes between two of Tibet's most significant monasteries (Ganden and Samye), the pathway's landscape varies greatly from winter to spring, showcasing snow-capped mountains or blooming wildflower meadows.



Presented by Luobu Puci

DAY 1 Lhasa
Visit the serene **Potala Palace**, sacred **Jokhang Temple** and bustling **Barkhor Street** in the city of Lhasa.

DAY 2 Ganden
A drive to **Ganden** takes visitors to the starting point of the trek. From here, they set off on a six-hour trek (17km) through **Hepu** to **Yamado** (300m ascent/450m descent).

DAY 3 Yama Do – Tsotup Chu Valley
Walk from **Yama Do** to **Tsotup Chu Valley** for five to seven hours across 10km (1,000m ascent/450m descent).

DAY 4 Tsotup Chu – Nomad's Camp
Next, head to the **Herders' Camps** on a five-hour trek that is 14km long (300m ascent/400m descent).

DAY 5 Nomad's Camp – Yamalung
Journey down to **Yamalung** on a five- to six-hour trek.

DAY 6 Yamalung – Samye – Lhasa
A four-hour downhill trek takes visitors to **Samye**, where they will be driven to their final destination of Lhasa.

DIETHELM TRAVEL
JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

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visit www.dietheltravel.com





HONG KONG

by Prudence Lui

THINGS TO NOTE

- The currencies of countries like China, Japan and South Korea may have depreciated, but there will be no cheaper knock-on deals in Hong Kong because its dollar is pegged to the US greenback.
- The five-level Midfield Concourse at Hong Kong Airport, located west of Terminal 1, will include 20 new aircraft parking stands. It is expected to be completed by the end of 2015 and will provide a valuable new facility.
- The MTR South Island Line is due to open at the end of 2016, slashing travel time between Admiralty and Ocean Park to four minutes.
- The Chinese Government's policy to relax or restrict its Individual Visit Scheme may exert a strong impact on visitor arrivals since nearly 80 per cent of Hong Kong's tourist traffic is generated by travellers from the mainland.
- Tension between Hong Kong people and the mainland Chinese may continue and may discourage the latter from visiting the city.

The Hong Kong city skyline ▲

OVERVIEW

The industry outlook for 2015 is rather bleak as Hong Kong's reputation was tarnished by one negative incident after another.

The 70 day-chaos of Occupy Central was bad enough, then came the ongoing clashes over parallel traders sourcing baby milk powder locally and selling the product over the border at a juicy mark-up. According to the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), tension between some Hong Kong residents and mainland visitors will likely continue to affect the latter's desire to travel to city.

In 1H2015, Hong Kong recorded 29 million visitor arrivals, only 2.8 per cent more than in the same period last year.

Hoteliers also face a challenging time this year and have no idea what to expect and how long the less-rosy situation will continue. They are unable to predict what 2016 holds.

While overall hotel occupancy is maintaining at a high 80 per cent, it may not be surprising to see double-digit drops in both rate and yield.

HKTB is also warning that other destinations are refining their marketing strategies to attract



Dim sum is sold on street corners as well restaurants © strippedpixel-123RF.com ▲

mainland visitors and competition will be keen. For example, some countries have relaxed their visa requirements for mainland travellers and currency devaluations in destinations like Japan and Korea will make them more attractive.

In order to drive arrivals in the second half of this year, HKTB is focusing on shorthaul markets and is running a campaign called Hong Kong Summer Fun, and will be offering over US\$50 million in prizes to entice shorthaul travellers.

Looking ahead, the industry remains cautious for both business and leisure travel next year given the present tough economic situation.

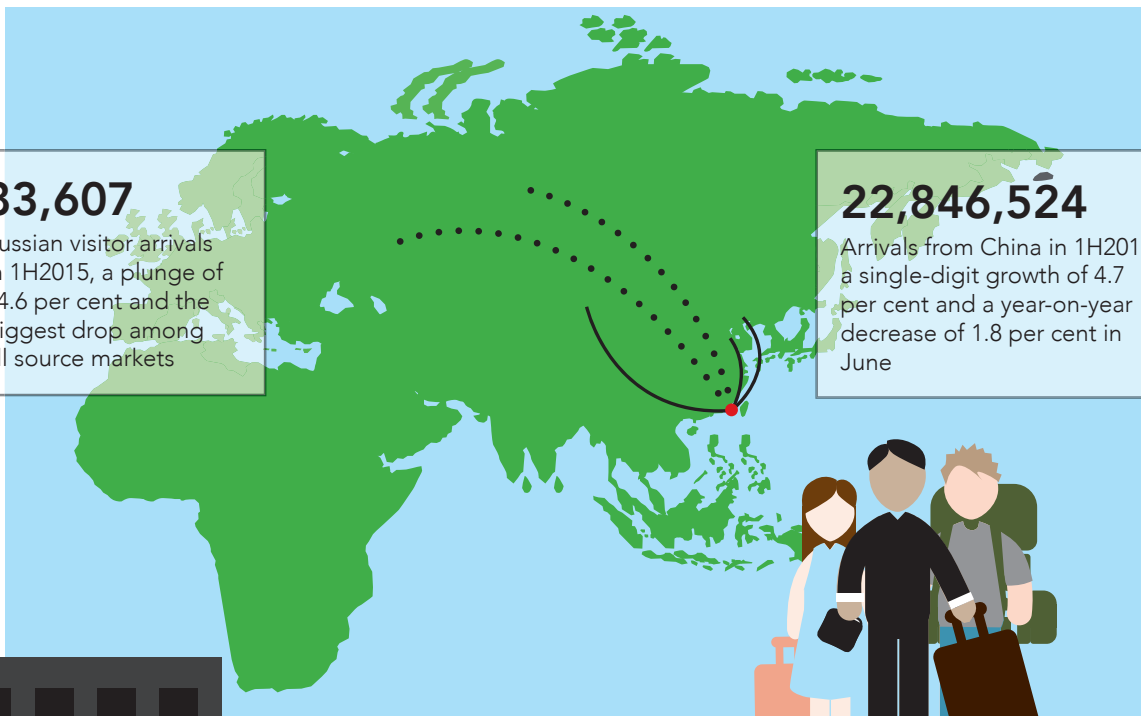
HONG KONG IN NUMBERS

83,607

Russian visitor arrivals in 1H2015, a plunge of 24.6 per cent and the biggest drop among all source markets

22,846,524

Arrivals from China in 1H2015, a single-digit growth of 4.7 per cent and a year-on-year decrease of 1.8 per cent in June



82

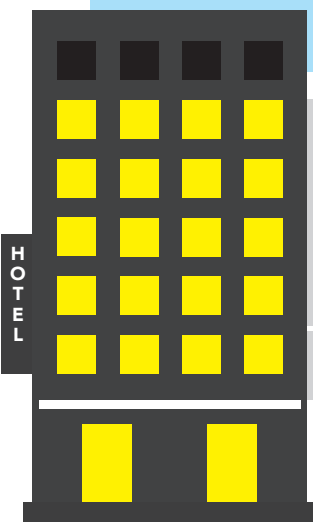
In percentage, the average hotel occupancy rate in 1H2015 with the average room rate falling 8.7 per cent to HK\$1,335 (US\$172.30)

248

The number of hotels offering 73,481 rooms. Supply will continue to grow over the next two years increasing to 298 hotels and 82,598 rooms

64.7

In millions, the record number of passengers handled by Hong Kong International Airport in fiscal 2014/15, an annual increase of 6.6 per cent, making it one of the 10 busiest passenger airports in the world



IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination

“The evolution of the ever more demanding savvy traveller and a diversified market-driven economy will make personalised products more popular given the universality of what Millennials and like-minded travellers want. The impact means hotels and the industry will have to work towards offering better advanced high-tech guest experiences, and at the same time establish favourable economic efficient operations.



John Girard,
area general manager (Hong Kong) and
general manager, Regal Airport Hotel Meeting
and Conference Centre

“Looking ahead, the macro environment will continue to be volatile and unpredictable, and the industry, being susceptible to external factors, will certainly be affected.



To rise to the challenges ahead, we must remain optimistic, nimble and entrepreneurial. Hong Kong tourism has very strong fundamentals and is a highly attractive destination with diverse and unbeatable experiences for visitors from around the world. HKTB is committed to working relentlessly together with the travel trade and other tourism related sectors to uphold Hong Kong's position as a preferred travel choice.

Anthony Lau,
executive director, Hong Kong Tourism Board

“As transportation links for Lantau diversify – with cross-border bus services linking the resort and 20 destinations in southern China and the impending completion of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge – Hong Kong Disneyland Resort will play an increasingly vital role on Lantau to make Hong Kong a vibrant destination. Being an integral part of the increasingly important gateway of Lantau, we will continue to expand and grow.



Terruce Wang,
vice president, sales and distribution marketing,
Hong Kong Disneyland Resort

“More people will fly than ever before, driven by the continued growth in demand out of Asia, but supply will increase in parallel, putting pressure on carriers' operating margins. I believe that more carriers will seek to enter into commercial cooperation with other airlines to fill the gaps in their networks.

Ivan Chu,
chief executive, Cathay Pacific



HONG KONG

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Rickshaw rides in a modern city

Since the government stopped issuing rickshaw licences, only three are left to carry passengers. Visitors can find them at Star Ferry in Central as the red pedicabs may be parked there.

2. The card that is hard to beat

The stored-value electronic Octopus Card can be used for purchases in supermarkets, convenience stores and some key fast food stores and is not just for travelling around Hong Kong's public transport system.

3. Experience the real Hong Kong jungle

Hong Kong is not just a concrete jungle. In fact, three-quarters of it is magnificent natural landscape and countryside. It takes less than 30 minutes to escape from downtown to nearby country parks.



▲ Po Lin Monastery © caminoel-123RF.com



Mickey and the Wondrous Book (left), Good Evening Kowloon Tour (centre), LEVELthirty Lounge & Bar ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

Mickey and the Wondrous Book, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort

Opening November 2015

A new stage show to celebrate the resort's 10th anniversary will be launched in Disney's Storybook Theater, offering an all-new experience of Disney stories, including *Frozen*.

In the show, Mickey and Goofy discover a magical book that can bring stories to life. Curious Mickey opens the book and the comical snowman Olaf falls out. While trying to get Olaf back into the book, Mickey is magically drawn in and sets out to find Olaf's story. Finally, Mickey and Goofy come across the incredible story of *Frozen* and restores Olaf to his rightful place.

Holiday Inn Express Hong Kong Mongkok

Opened May 2015

The 147-room hotel is located in a newly-constructed commercial building within Mongkok and guest rooms are between the sixth and 17 floors.

The hotel enjoys excellent accessibility as Tung Choi Street ladies market and Temple Street night market are just a short walk away, as are the Yau Ma Tei and Mongkok MTR Stations.

Rates include daily complimentary set breakfast, free wi-fi Internet access and families can also take advantage of the Kids Eat Free programme.

Good Evening Kowloon Tour

Opened 2015

This three-hour walking tour available every Tuesday and Saturday night takes visitors to lively areas of Yau Ma Tei and Jordan.

A taste of local entertainment in a singing parlour and delicacies in Temple Street give visitors a glimpse into Chinese culture.

The tour includes stops at a heritage red-brick building on Shanghai Street, the classic Yau Ma Tei Cinema as well as Yau Ma Tei Wholesale Fruit Market.

LEVELthirty Lounge & Bar, Courtyard by Marriott Hong Kong Sha Tin

Opened July 2015

Spanning the 30th floor rooftop, the venue overlooks panoramic views of Sha Tin Racecourse and Tolo Harbour.

Open from 17.00 to 20.00 daily, there is a choice of outdoor and indoor seating and two VIP rooms. Food-wise, the menu includes Asian and Western tapas, pizzas and bar bites.

Causeway Bay's hot, new drinking hole

Opened October 2015

The Park Lane Hotel, a Pullman Hotel, has unveiled a refurbished Ebb & Flow lobby lounge.

Conceived with the modern traveller in mind, the hyper-connected space features a modern design, cutting-edge technology elements and delectable drink and food options.

It offers the ideal meeting place for leisure and business.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Cathay Pacific Airways

Tel: (852) 274 73311

Website: www.cathaypacific.com

Airport Authority Hong Kong

Tel: (852) 2188 7111

Website: www.hongkongairport.com/eng/business/

Hong Kong Tourism Board

Tel: (852) 2807 6543

Website: www.discoverhongkong.com

Travel Industry Council

Tel: (852) 2807 1199

Website: www.tichk.org

Hong Kong Association of Travel Agents

Tel: (852) 2869 8624

Website: www.hata.org.hk



SPOTLIGHT ON HONG KONG

with **DIETHELM TRAVEL**

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME



An ever-changing city where East meets West, Hong Kong offers travellers the alluring glamour of the ancient East with the appeal of a thoroughly modern, fast-paced city. Whether a traveller has visited Hong Kong two times or 20, no two stays in this compelling destination are ever the same.

PRODUCT NEWS

In Hong Kong, the region's fascinating culture, culinary delights and unique heritage take centre stage. From impressive developments at popular attractions such as Ocean Park and Hong Kong Disneyland, to the rise of new local walking tours showcasing the city's hidden gems, to a number of soon-to-open boutique hotels, the city is continually developing and reinventing itself, especially when it comes to being one of the world's premier tourist destinations.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

Diethelm Travel Group's exclusive selection of Diethelm Distinctive excursions are specially designed to provide even more unique value for explorers wanting to go beyond the usual tour offerings. These discerning travellers dream of truly experiencing a place while learning about the destination's culture, heritage and lifestyle, and Diethelm delivers.

In Hong Kong, guests can participate in a number of Diethelm Distinctive offerings to see a different side of the city not often noticed by tourists. Diethelm's Walking Experience of Hong Kong's Colonial History, for example, is the only tour of its kind in the city taking guests to discover the fascinating Government Hill area on Hong Kong island, historically known as Victoria City. For those wanting to dig deeper into the history of Hong Kong, there is no better way than this four-hour personalised

walking tour with stops at some of the city's most intriguing and historically significant sites.

Of course, a trip to Hong Kong would not be complete without taking part in some world-class shopping. To soak up the local atmosphere, Diethelm Distinctive options include a rare private walking experience for true shopaholics to wander through atmospheric street markets and shopping streets – entire thoroughfares dedicated to one type of product such as goldfish, birds, clothes, flowers and more.

I RECOMMEND...

In this thriving city that never sleeps, there is always something new to see, do and savour.

To ensure a thoroughly memorable journey, make sure to contact Diethelm Travel Hong Kong for insider travel tips and unique excursions unavailable anywhere else. Experience Diethelm Distinctive or special interest excursions, such as personalised home stays, to maximise your time spent in Hong Kong and experience it both by land and by sea.

Also indulge in the city's variety of excellent cuisine. Visit a Hong Kong-style café and try typical Hong Kong food such as "silk stocking" milk tea and an egg tart.



Richard Willis, Managing Director,
Diethelm Travel Hong Kong

30 DON'T MISS



- Chinese New Year**
 January or February
 With glowing lanterns, crowded temples and dancing lions, the New Year sees the most vibrant expressions of the soul of the city.
- Dragon Boat Carnival**
 June
 Considered one of the region's greatest parties, this festival draws hundreds of thousands of revellers to each year.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



Leveraging Hong Kong's ecological richness and diversity, Diethelm Travel Hong Kong strives to promote green tourism in the New Territories with regard to the principles of nature conservation and sustainable development. For instance, the New Territories Trail Diethelm Distinctive excursion features the Hong Kong Wetland Park, comprising a 10,000m² visitor centre, a 60-hectare Wetland Reserve and Wetland Interactive

World including themed exhibition galleries, a theatre, indoor play area for "swamp adventures" and a resource centre. This attraction provides travellers of all ages with an unequalled experience combining nature conservation and education with an intriguing tourism attraction.

BEST BUYS



With competitive prices guaranteed by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, the city offers some of the best shopping in the world. While visitors can enjoy meandering through Hong Kong's malls and markets, Harbour City beats them all with more than 700 shops, plus dining and entertainment options to explore!

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



Hong Kong is one of the most talked-about dining destinations in the world. It is where celebrity chefs compete to showcase their talent and where ambitious diners come in droves to be the first to experience exotic edible creations. No visitor can leave Hong Kong without first enjoying dim sum – the city's unofficial pastime. For another uniquely Hong Kong experience, try sampling an outdoor street fare!



TRIP INSPIRATION

Insight of Hong Kong

A seasoned local tour guide with more than 20 years of experience, knows all there is about discovering Hong Kong and recommends a four-day visit for first-time visitors.



Presented by George Yuan

DAY 1

Start by enjoying the first evening on a cruise around **Victoria Harbour**, followed by dinner atop **the Peak** for amazing views of the skyline, then visit the **Temple Street night market**, Hong Kong's busiest night market.

Take a full-day excursion to Hong Kong island visiting **Aberdeen**, **Stanley Market**, **Victoria Peak** and eating a delicious dim sum lunch at a floating restaurant. In the evening, marvel at the **Symphony of Lights** Light and Sound Show along the harbour before a **Peking Duck dinner** and, perhaps a night cap in **Lan Kwai Fong**, a trendy entertainment district.

DAY 2

DAY 3

Choose between a Hong Kong excursion to **Lantau island** to see the famous Big Buddha and charming Tai O fishing village, or visiting nearby **Macau**, Asia's oldest European settlement that is dotted with UNESCO Heritage Sites.

Before departing, join one of the **Diethelm Distinctive private walking tours** designed to take shoppers to some of the best places to browse in the city.

DAY 4

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INDIA

by Imran Khan



THINGS TO NOTE

- The highway connecting India, Myanmar and Thailand is scheduled to be operational in November 2015, giving a much-needed boost to India's inbound and outbound tourism.
- Nalanda is being nominated by the Ministry of Culture for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2016. The ancient ruins are about 95km south-east of Patna, capital of Bihar.
- North-eastern Manipur state is spending US\$10.84 million to develop and connect Imphal, Moirang, Khongjom and Moreh, while Sikkim is spending US\$14.86 million on tourism development.
- After the much-awaited entry of Planet Hollywood, other international brands and companies such as W by Starwood and Dubai's Jumeirah Group will be present in India by 2017.
- The depreciation of the rupee is expected to have a positive influence on both inbound traffic and domestic tourism. The weaker rupee is estimated to make foreign trips about 15 to 20 per cent costlier for Indians, which some say may compel them to shift focus towards domestic destinations.

Harmandir Sahib © dimol-123RF.com ▲

OVERVIEW

The Ministry of Tourism in India is leaving no stone unturned to revive the country's tourism potential making it a safe, year-round destination. The ministry's new aim is to reach the desired goal of one per cent growth in international tourists footfalls by end-2015 and two per cent international visits by 2025. It is adopting a multi-pronged strategy, which includes signing Memorandums-of-Understanding (MoU's) with other countries and by offering visa-on-arrival.

India's growth in foreign tourist arrivals saw a slight increase – from 0.64 per cent in 2013 to 0.68 per cent in 2014.

In the last two years, the ministry has signed MoU's with over 10 countries including Japan, Australia and China.

2014 was a historic year for tourism as the government implemented the first phase of Tourist Visas on Arrival enabled by Electronic Travel Authorization.

As a result, more than 22,000 visas were reprocessed since its launch on November 27, 2014 until December

2014. Going forward the government will make e-tourist visas available to 150 countries by March 2016.

Meanwhile, the number of foreign tourist arrivals has shown a healthy increase with India registering a growth of 4.5 per cent between January and August 2015. There were 5.68 million tourists compared with 4.85 million tourists for the same period in 2014.

The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2015 of the World Economic Forum ranked India 52nd in 2015, up from 65th in 2013.

Mahesh Sharma, minister of state for tourism (Independent Charge), Culture (Independent Charge) and Civil Aviation, said: "Tourism depends to a large extent on the image of the country and the ministry is making all efforts to facilitate the tourists to create a favourable impact on tourism."

In addition, marketing representatives in Russia (covering Kazakhstan and Ukraine), Argentina (covering Peru, Chile and other neighbouring Spanish-speaking countries), Spain (covering Spain and Portugal), Brazil, Thailand and Korea are being appointed to promote India.

The ministry is also pushing ahead with two new tourism schemes – the National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive and Swadesh Darshan to improve the infrastructure in the respective destinations and circuits.



▲ Chawri Bazar © meinzahn-123RF.com

INDIA IN NUMBERS

6,072,501

The number of domestic and foreign tourists who visited the Taj Mahal in 2014



5.68

In millions, the number of foreign tourists arrivals between January and August 2015 compared to 4.85 million for the same period in 2014, up 4.5 per cent

15.79

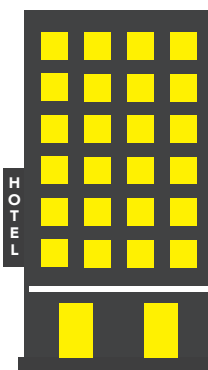
In percentage, the share in August 2015 of visitor arrivals from Bangladesh, which is the top source countries for India, followed by the US (12.52 per cent), the UK (9.71 per cent), Sri Lanka (7.25 per cent) and Malaysia (3.54 per cent). They accounted for 48.81 per cent of total foreign tourists arrivals in August 2015

1.608

In billion US dollars, foreign exchange earnings in August 2015 compared to US\$1.706 billion in August 2014

13.017

In billion US dollars, foreign exchange earnings between January and August 2015, a drop of 1.3 per cent compared to the US\$13.190 billion for the same period in 2014



2

In percentage, the increase of hotel rates in 1H2015 to an average of INR6,411 (US\$177). Mumbai recorded the highest rise of five per cent with an average rate of INR8,091 making it the most expensive city for hotel rooms in 1H2015

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



A supportive civil aviation policy can fortify the Indian aviation industry's global positioning. A liberalised policy will open up international skies for Indian carriers which will benefit Indian travellers and also help India to effectively utilise her bilateral rights. Key issues that need to be addressed in the policy formulation are the 5/20 rule, utilisation of bilateral rights, viability gap funding for remote regional routes, allowing the market forces to prevail and most importantly ease of doing business. We are hoping the new policy will be announced very soon.



Phee Teik Yeoh,
CEO, Vistara



The hotel industry has seen marginal improvement over the past 12 months. This trend is expected to continue into the next few years and we anticipate that 2017/18 will be good years as demand would start outstripping supply and thereby leading to improved occupancies and also average rates. Due to global economic uncertainty and difficulty in getting easy finance in India, the number of hotel projects under construction has declined and this is a very positive sign for existing hotel players and those who are able to complete projects. Meanwhile expect more hotels to transact and change hands, which is a sign of a maturing hotel industry.



Manav Thadani,
chairman, HVS - Asia Pacific



Maharashtra's only scuba diving training centre in Tarkarli is expected to be an exciting tourism attraction. The Indian Institute of Scuba Diving and Aquatic Sports, in Tarkarli, Sindhudurg, may soon get international accreditation following a recent inspection visit by experts from Professional Association of Diving Instructors. We have already done a soft launch of the centre developed by Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation. However, the official opening is yet to happen. We will try and inaugurate it within the next month.



Valsa Nair Singh,
secretary, tourism, Government of Maharashtra

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. In the name of love

One man in Gehlaur, Bihar took 22 years to break a mountain and carve a path through a 110m long, nine metre wide and eight metre high hillock using only a hammer and chisel for the love of his wife. Tourists have flocked to see the symbol of love after the release of the Bollywood movie *Manjhi – The Mountain Man*.

2. Mumbai given as royal dowry

In the marriage treaty of Charles II of England and Catherine of Braganza, daughter of King John IV of Portugal, Mumbai was made part of Catherine's dowry to Charles in May 11, 1661. Today, Mumbai is the financial, commercial and entertainment capital of India.

3. A Kashmiri feast

Visitors to Kashmir must make sure to taste the delicious 36-course Kashmiri meal known as Wazwan. Wazwan preparation is considered an art and a point of pride in Kashmiri Muslim culture and identity. Almost all the dishes are meat-based using lamb or chicken. It is popular throughout Kashmir besides being served elsewhere in India at major hotels and restaurants.



▲ Jama Masjid © saiko3p-123RF.com



Rajasthan Cycling Tour (left), Taraporewala Aquarium (centre), JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

Madhya Pradesh Rail Coach Restaurant

Launched September 2015

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Year is being celebrated this year and next and the state is gearing up to give visitors a reason to taste its various delicacies by launching two new Rail Coach Restaurant in Indore and Jabalpur.

Rail Coach Restaurant is said to be the world's first restaurant in a Broad-Gauge Rail Coach. The state is further enhancing the experience by organising water sports activities called Jheel Mohotsav at nine different places.

Planet Hollywood Beach Resort, Goa

Opened April 2015

The hotel is located on Uttorda Beach in South Goa. Spread over four hectares, Planet Hollywood has a private beach and is located on one of the cleanest beaches in Goa. It is an upscale property with a stunning collection of rooms, each with its own one-of-a-kind touch of Hollywood memorabilia and richly appointed amenities to cater to business and leisure travellers.

JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar

Opened March 2015

Situated directly opposite the new Mumbai International Airport T2, guests will find the luxurious JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, offering authentic, crafted experiences reflecting enriching guests stay.

The 585-room hotel, with 29 rooms featuring an outdoor balcony and 39 suites, exudes great style and sophistication in terms of its design and interiors. Besides JW Café guests can savour the offerings at JW Baking Company, an adaptation of the classic pastry shop and at Italian restaurant called Romano's.

Taraporewala Aquarium

Opened March 2015

Located in south Mumbai in famous Marine Drive, often referred to as Queen's Necklace, the country's oldest and one of the main attractions has been reopened after a break of two years.

The aquarium, renovated for US\$3 million, has 2,000 fishes from more than 400 species. It has a four-metre long and 360-degree acrylic glass tunnel. Another attraction is the special touching pools for children.

Rajasthan Cycling Tour with Leopard Safari

Opened April 2015

Rajasthan is widely known for its deserts and royal palaces and Adventure Nation is offering Rajasthan Cycling Tour with Leopard Safari, the only one of its kind in the region.

The four-day/three night package covers Udaipur, Kumbhalgarh, Godwad Leopard Safari Camp, Narlai and activities include cycling, camping and wildlife safari.

Among the attractions is the Great Wall of India – Kumbhalgarh Fort Wall, said to be the second-longest continuous wall after the Great Wall of China.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Air India

Tel: (91 11) 2462 4074 / 4075
Website: www.airindia.in

Airports Authority of India

Tel: (91 11) 2463 2950
Website: www.aai.aero

Ministry of Tourism

Website: www.tourism.gov.in

India Tourism Delhi

Tel: (91 11) 2332 0342 / 0005 / 0008

India Tourism Mumbai

Tel: (91 22) 2203 3144 / 5, 2207 4333 / 4

Travel Agents Association of India

Tel: (91 22) 2207 4022 / 8184 / 4083 6767

Hotel Association of India

Tel: (91 11) 2617 1110 / 14
Website: www.hotelassociationofindia.com



INDONESIA

by Mimi Hudoyo

THINGS TO NOTE

- Political and social stability and improvement in the economic situation will make the country more attractive to travellers and tourism investors.
- The new marketing budget is three times more compared to 2015 at 4.5 trillion rupiah (US\$123.5 million) and the tourism authority is focusing on ASEAN, Asia and Pacific countries. China in particular will continue to receive a significant budget share.
- At press time, citizens of 45 countries, are enjoying visa-free entry and another 47 countries, including Australia, India and Taiwan, from October.
- Airports in secondary and tertiary destinations will offer better accessibility. The runway at Sultan Sharif Kasim II, Pekanbaru, Riau, for example, will be extended from 2,250m to 2,600m, while the runway at Belimbing Sari Airport in Banyuwangi, East Java will be extended from 1,800m to 2,250m.
- There will be new and revitalised products from eco tours in Toraja to a transport museum in Malang, East Java, to Jakarta's Fantasy World Ocean theme park with attractions and rides. The new park is scheduled to open in 2018.

Tongkonan in South Sulawesi ▲

OVERVIEW

International visitor arrivals between January and July 2015, totalled 5,472,050, an increase of 2.7 per cent, compared to 5,328,732 for the same period in 2014.

As a result, the Indonesian tourism authority is confident that the minimum target of 10 million arrivals by the end of this year will be achieved, especially when performance is traditionally better in the second half. The government this year has set a low target of 10 million arrivals and high target of 12 million.

Of the month-on-month performance, June, July and August is the high season period for Indonesia with the school holidays in June and July. However, arrivals in June declined by 4.27 per cent compared to June 2014 and July performance was merely up by 4.76 per cent.

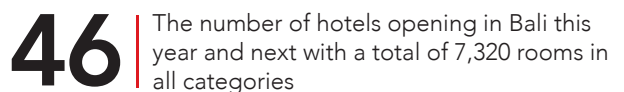
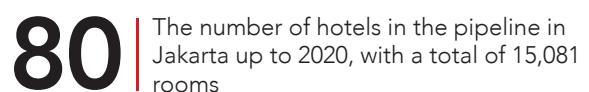
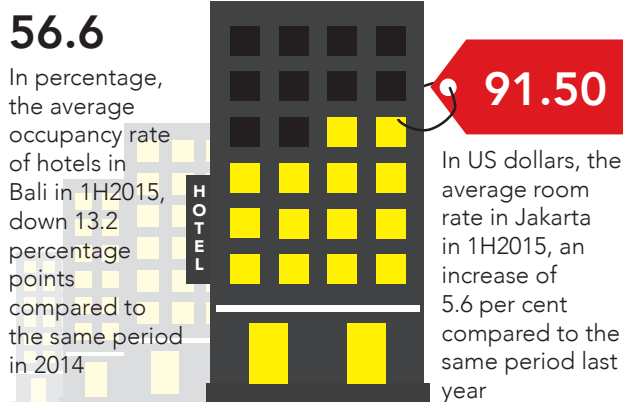
Indonesian tourism stakeholders said several factors had pressed growth. The global economic condition is one factor. Internally, the Muslim fasting month this year fell in June and arrivals from countries with Muslim majority travellers dropped, according to Arief Yahya, minister of tourism.

The closing of Ngurah Rai International Airport several times due to the eruption of Mount Raung had also affected arrivals.



Traditional art of local people from Raja Ampat © ndul-123RF.com ▲

INDONESIA IN NUMBERS



As such, tourism stakeholders need to work very hard to reach the arrival target set.

As part of the efforts, the government has opened the country wider with visa-free facilities. In June, visa-free entry privileges were granted to 30 countries and the policy resulted in a 15 per cent increase of arrivals from these countries in June and July.

Originally planned to be granted to another 50 countries next year, the government just announced 47 more at press time for the privilege to take effect from October 2015 to gain momentum for the Christmas-New Year holiday season.

Among other efforts, the Ministry of Tourism has also invested 15 billion rupiah (US\$1.1 million) in joint tourism promotions with 21 European tour wholesalers to boost arrivals to the country, the first joint promotion the government is undertaking with the European tour operators on such a scale.

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination

“The government’s commitment to prioritise tourism is clearly shown in its policies, such as the intent to double from 45 the number of countries enjoying visa-free entry. Tourism has never received a significant budget allotment for marketing before. This year, the 1.3 trillion rupiah (US\$93 million) was four times bigger than last year and in 2016 it will increase to 4.5 trillion rupiah. As a result, we can expect rapid growth in arrivals and the target of 20 million by 2019 can be achieved.



I Gde Pitana,

deputy minister for international tourism marketing,
Ministry of Tourism

“President Joko Widodo’s administration wants to transform the country. The transitional period might take a couple of years if it works, and I hope it will work. This will have an impact on the property and hotel industries. Some people may not be able to finance the hotel (operations) and takeovers might take place, hotel constructions may slow down or in some cases stop. The many hotel developments we see today have been ongoing since the last three to four years when there was a bit of an economic boom. Going forward, we might see less new hotel development. We are also seeing more and more domestic players and overseas hotel operators in Indonesia. There will be a bit of readjustment, a clean-up in the market, where the strong ones will stay, the others will not.

Marc Steinmeyer,

director, TAUZIA Hotel Management



“The development and improvement of airports beyond Bali that the government has been working on in the last couple of years will allow airlines to operate to the secondary and tertiary destinations and open up the more remote areas. This will benefit tourism. Travellers can explore Indonesia beyond Bali. As there is an oversupply of aircraft, what it means for travellers is a lower cost per available seat mile.

Juvenile Jodjana,

CEO TransNusa Aviation Mandiri

“The economic slowdown and the depreciation of the rupiah against the US dollar will open up opportunities. Travelling has become a need for Indonesians, so the demand is there. It is up to us the travel industry to turn that into a decision to travel in such a situation. The strengthening of the US dollar affects many countries.

There are countries whose currency declined deeper than in Indonesia, so travelling to these countries should be more affordable. It is to these destinations we should focus our promotions. It is also an opportunity to promote domestic travel which Indonesian regional destinations should take advantage of.

Budi Tirtawisata,

Group CEO of Panorama Group

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Giant flower does not smell so sweet

Rafflesia Arnoldii, the biggest flower in the world is one of three Indonesia’s national flowers categorised as puspa langka or rare flower. The flower which has a short bloom time of between five to seven days can have a diameter of up to 100cm and weigh up to 10kg. The flower is also known as corpse flower because of its rotten-flesh smell.

2. A place where death is a big celebration

To the people of Toraja, South Sulawesi, death is not something to mourn. Death is a celebration that the deceased has achieved the ultimate goal of life. Big feasts and traditional dances are held during the Rambu Solo death ceremony.

3. Prehistoric information hidden in the caves

Karst Maros Pangkep, South Sulawesi, is the largest karst area in the world after the South China Karst region in Yunnan. Karst Maros Pangkep is located about 50km away from Makassar, covering an area of more than 43,750 hectares. Its prehistoric caves provide valuable sources of archaeological information.



▲ Water Palace of Tirta Gangga in East Bali © flocu-123RF.com



Alila Seminyak (left), Komodo dragon in Komodo Island ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

INDONESIA

Komodo Photography Tour

Launched August 2015

Photography enthusiasts enjoy a close encounter with the Komodo dragon and also other animals living on the islands. Capturing the scenery and sunrise on Padar Island, climbing Sulphurea Hill and Frigate Hill – with a magnificent view across the islands, exploring bays and beaches and strolling along the unique Pink Beach are some activities in the itinerary.

Other activities include sunrise photography tours to Waicicu Hill, visiting the local market in Labuanbajo and Batu Cermin Cave

Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve

Opened September 2015

Mandapa features 35 luxurious and spacious suites, 25 pool villas including a three-bedroom pool villa.

It offers individually tailored spiritual, wellness, health and detox programmes as well as activities to suit travellers of all ages.

Named after the entrance to a traditional Hindu temple, Mandapa has restaurants offering Indonesian and Mediterranean and tailored health-conscious menus. Dining Beyond is an exclusive culinary journey to dine in special and exclusive locations in the Reserve.

Alila Seminyak

Opened October 2015

Alila's fifth property has 240 rooms and a penthouse and facilities include an open-kitchen Asian restaurant, Spa Alila, a gym and wellness centre and a Leisure Concierge to organise signature Alila Experiences.

The resort's eco and energy solutions include the use of local and recyclable building materials, operating completely paperless, bottling its own water, low-energy light fixtures, rainwater harvesting and environmental and building management systems.

Cultural Festival Tour around Waisak

Launched January 2015

Suitable for groups of between four and 12 people, the tour follows the rituals to celebrate Waisak (Vesak) Day at Borobudur Temple.

It starts with obtaining water from pristine springs at Jumprit in Temanggung and igniting the Vesak torch to be used during the ceremony at the Borobudur Temple.

The programme combines a sunrise excursion from Putuk Setumbu, near Borobudur Temple, other Jogjakarta's highlights and Prambanan Temple.

Benoa Flyboard

Opened June 2015

Benoa Flyboard is a new attraction at the Whacko Beach Club in Tanjung Benoa, Bali.

Flyboarding involves the rider standing on a board connected by a long hose to the jetski and jet nozzles underneath a pair of boots forcing water to thrust the rider to fly up to 15m in the air.

The package is available for 15-minutes and 30-minutes rides including transfers from hotels in Nusa Dua and Kuta. It is suitable only for water sport enthusiasts who are at least 10 years old and 122cm tall.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Garuda Indonesia

Tel: (62 21) 2351 9999

Website: www.garuda-indonesia.com

Indonesia Ministry of Tourism

Tel: (62 21) 383 8899/8167

Website: www.parekraf.go.id

Association of the Indonesian Tour and Travel Agencies

Tel: (62 21) 7590 0094/95

Website: www.asita.org

Indonesia Ticketing Agents Association

Tel: (62 21) 3199 0535

Website: www.astindo.org

Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association

Tel: (62 21) 2135 22540

Website: www.phrionline.com



LAOS

by Jiratkul Wangsiripaisarn,
Pichamon Sukpanyatham,
Phasu Leelaprachakul
and Phatsamon Thongklo-on



Wat Xieng Thong ▲

THINGS TO NOTE

- The determination of Laos to move from being land-locked to a land-linked highlights a shift in mindset that augurs well for the future.
- Its geographic position as the heart of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) will also assist in this move as the GMS itself is gaining increasing recognition as a tourism product.
- Continued development of essential infrastructure for road and air connectivity is making it easier for neighbouring travellers to enter Laos through a number of gateways beyond its four international airports. In addition, seats on scheduled international airlines have increased by 33 per cent between 2012 and 2015, showing a positive perception of tourism to the country.
- Similarly, the availability of visa-on-arrival for many nationals is making the process of entering the country much easier and facilitates the expected growth of 15 per cent in 2016.
- To cater to the increased tourism demand, accommodation stock has increased substantially with available rooms doubling since 2008, from 22,173 to 44,714 by the end of 2014.

OVERVIEW

Laos has seen its international arrival figures grow by very close to 13 per cent in 1H2015, which translates to an incremental inbound volume increase of more than 260,000 additional international arrivals for the period.

The result is less than 10 per cent behind PATA's forecasts for 1Q2015 and will come close to PATA's full year prediction that the country will receive in excess of five million international arrivals for the first time ever this year.

Furthermore, Laos has substantially improved its relative position within the ASEAN bloc over successive first-half year periods, rising from a relative share of 4.2 per cent of all international arrivals into ASEAN during the first-half period of 2010 to around 5.2 per cent after the first-half period of 2015.

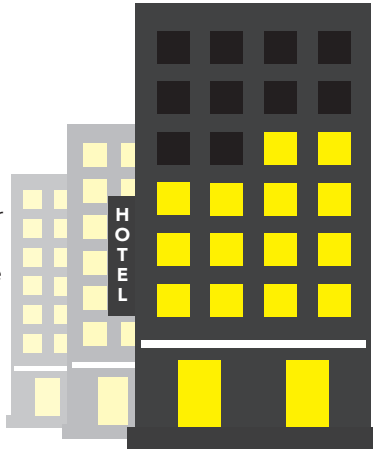
Of the top five growth markets into Laos in 1H2015, four are from Asia. It is led by Thailand, which individually has contributed more than 96,000 additional arrivals between 1H2014 and 1H2015, and followed by China, Vietnam, South Korea and France. Collectively, these five source markets have added close to 270,000 additional foreign arrivals in 1H2015 over 1H2014.

The outlook is strong as well with PATA predicting that Laos will receive well around 9.4 million foreign arrivals annually by 2020, and that volume of foreigners generating US\$1.3 billion in tourism revenues.

LAOS IN NUMBERS

57

In percentage, the overall average room occupancy rate in 2014, with Vientiane and Luang Prabang performing much better at 73 per cent and 71 per cent respectively. It was Khammouane however that turned in the best performance and stealing the show with the highest room occupancy rate for the year at 75 per cent



1,911

The number of guesthouses to-date and the dominant accommodation style, although hotels have been catching up. They offer some 24,667 rooms and 30,017 beds, compared to 515 guesthouses offering 20,020 rooms and 25,737 beds. As expected, the room distribution is very much concentrated in Vientiane, the capital (27 per cent), followed by Luang Prabang (13 per cent), Vientiane province (11 per cent), Savannakhet (10 per cent) and Champasack (just under 10 per cent)

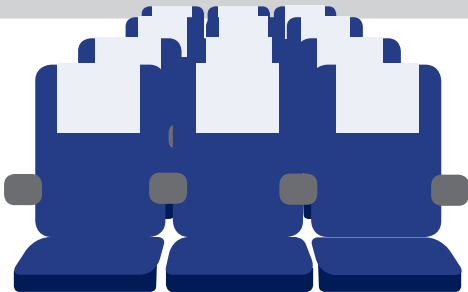
4.2

In millions, the number of visitor arrivals in 2014. Growth has been positive for 11 consecutive years, with some of those periods seeing growth gains of between 20 and 40 per cent



642

In millions of US dollars, tourism revenue in 2014. Much of this revenue comes from visitors from Thailand and to a lesser extent, Vietnam – and between them accounting for 76 per cent of all tourist expenditure in 2014 and holding that one-two position for expenditure for a number of years



1.26

In millions, the number of airline seats in 2015, just three-quarters of one per cent of the total into South-east Asia

109,800

Seat capacity between Laos and Korea in 2015, up from 14,200 in 2012, the strongest growth for any destination



▲ Alms offering to local monks

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“Laos is on a strong growth track and by 2020 will have close to four times more foreign arrivals annually than it did in 2010.

Inbound arrivals by 2020 will be dominated by Asian visitors, with Thailand and Vietnam supplying over 80 per cent of traffic.

Laos will become an even more significant player in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), with its share among the South-east Asia players rising from 7.7 per cent in 2010 to over 11 per cent in 2020.

The tourism newcomer has long been perceived as being largely underdeveloped but that is changing rapidly with the potential in tourism being recognised.

Minerals are the single largest generator of foreign revenues, tourism ranks second and electricity third. Together they contributed close to three-quarters of the total foreign revenue for the country.

Furthermore, foreign revenues from tourism have grown at an average annual rate of 14 per cent since 2010, while minerals have averaged less than half of that (six per cent) over the same period.

The generation of power for example, in a manner similar to that of Switzerland, could turn the country into a regional generator of power for South-east Asia.

Positioning Laos as being land-linked as opposed to land-locked is uncovering new potential.

The rise in tourism has improved the focus on attractions and natural sites and as more of these become restored and/or protected, a greater wealth of assets available to the visitor becomes available to the benefit of the tourists and the country alike.

The perception of being land-linked also opens up opportunities for Laos as it recognises the potential in being the only GMS country bordering Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Yunnan in China.

Given the recent developments in Laos, it is obvious that it intends to become a strong player in ASEAN, and eventually the global tourism marketplace.

As such, it is positioning itself well to take advantage of not only its linked geography, but also its plethora of natural and cultural assets and will be a welcome contributor to the ASEAN tourism system and its own national development agenda.

John Koldowski,

member, Tourism Action Group,
a specialist unit within the College of Innovation at
Thailand's Thammasat University

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Becoming the 'battery of Asia'

There are plans to build a number of dams across the Mekong River and some of its tributaries to feed an already existing hydropower plant on two tributaries of the Se Kong River, just 100km from the southern border with Cambodia. The aim is for Laos to become “the battery of Asia” and generate enough power to enable it to export to other countries in the region. It remains however, a highly controversial plan.

2. New Vientiane airport in the pipeline

With the current Wattay International Airport reaching capacity, a new airport is being planned and is expected to be located in an area around 35km from Vientiane city. It will take around five years to complete.

3. A significant year for Laos

Laos will become the chair of ASEAN in 2016, the first year of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and some 12 years after it last held the ASEAN Chair in 2004.

When Laos last held the chair, the Vientiane Action Plan for the ASEAN Communities was issued and it has since been recognised as one of the key milestones of the AEC.



▲ Pak Ou Caves © rchphoto-123RF.com



Tat Somphamit Waterfalls ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

LAOS

Tat Somphamit Waterfalls

One of the hidden gems of Laos, the adventure and nature lover cannot afford to miss the Tat Somphamit Waterfalls.

Visitors can rent a bike from Don Det and cross the bridge to enjoy an easy ride to the stunning waterfalls.

There is also a great little beach where visitors can rest and cool down. The surroundings are very peaceful and quiet, and allows visitors to completely relax in a natural environment.

Lao Experiences welcomes foodies

Food lovers can gather at Lao Experiences, a place where visitors and locals alike can enjoy a variety of food and also learn how to prepare it.

Upon entering the village, visitors will find the local Laotian market where they can pick and choose fresh ingredients from what is available there. After the shopping the fun begins.

Cooking classes take place in the garden and visitors learn how to cook and serve traditional Laos cuisine.

Hotel bounty

More than 40 hotels are scheduled to open over the next five years to cater to growing tourism demand.

Three global brands – Ibis, Mercure, and Best Western – have already opened in Vientiane, and one has entered Luang Prabang. In addition between 25 and 30 three- and four-star hotels will soon open in a number of places including Vientiane city.

Railway will transform rural Laos

The plan to construct a railway from China's south-west Yunnan Province all the way to Singapore is set to transform rural Laos.

The state-of-the-art railway station town just outside the village of Oudomxai will be able to handle trains that operate at 193kph.

Starting in Kunming, the service will extend south through Laos before entering Thailand, Malaysia and stop in Singapore. Other branches of the network are expected to reach Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Tree Top Explorer

This attraction allows visitors to enjoy new jungle experiences and a number of green, environmentally friendly activities to increase anyone's adrenalin levels.

The zipline will fly daredevils into the jungle while passing a huge waterfall. Visitors can also abseil down the 100m water-wall, trek through the forest, and enjoy food that is 100 per cent organic and straight from nature's backyard.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Lao Airlines

Tel: (856 21) 5132 4346

Website: www.laoairlines.com

Wattay International Airport

Tel: (856 21) 512 006

Website: www.vientianeairport.com

Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Department of Tourism Marketing

Tel: (856 21) 212 251

Website: www.tourismLaos.org

Lao Hotel & Restaurant Association

Tel: (856 21) 241 017

Website: www.laohotelassociation.org

Lao Association of Travel Agents

Tel: (856 21) 251 769

Website: www.lataLaos.org

SPOTLIGHT ON LAOS



with

DIETHELM TRAVEL

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

Experience the friendly, laid-back nature of the Lao people amongst a backdrop of rich Buddhist heritage while lingering over long meals and lazy afternoons. Offering some of the most authentic experiences in South-east Asia, not to mention striking landscapes and unforgettable charm, Laos continues to delight intrepid travellers.

PRODUCT NEWS

Be dazzled by exploring the world's largest river cave passage traversing a spectacular landscape of limestone karst mountains and amazing caves. The Giant Caves and Karst of Khammouane tour lets adventurous explorers kayak through the incredible rock formations and emerald waters of this immense cave system for nine memorable days. A true natural wonder, the series of giant caves seems surreal at first and must be seen to believe!

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

Many travel to Laos in search of serenity and peace, finding the quiet country a welcome refuge among the rapidly developing neighbours of Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand. However, to find true balance it is not just the place that plays a part. Most importantly, the traveller must look inside himself to find inner peace. Known for its long history as a Buddhist country, Laos is an excellent destination to start a journey of self discovery. The latest Diethelm Distinctive offering from Diethelm Travel Laos guides soul searchers in practising the ancient tradition of Buddhist meditation and healing. On this exclusive Zen journey, guests visit a Buddhist temple to meet with a monk who teaches the art of meditation – truly a once in a lifetime experience. By explaining various meditation

techniques in the tranquillity of the local temple, surrounded by novices, guests are exposed to a time-honoured tradition and personal practice they can take with them wherever their travels may take them.

After the meditation session, guests then have the opportunity to slip into an even deeper state of relaxation by indulging in a customary sauna spiced with Lao herbs and flowers then ending the afternoon with a one-hour traditional Lao massage.

I RECOMMEND...

Vientiane may just be the cleanest city in all of South-east Asia with carefully trimmed bushes and meticulously manicured roadside gardens. The capital offers a great selection of accommodation, restaurants and outdoor cafés, many with a noticeably French flair and architecture that creates a pleasing contrast with the traditional Buddhist temples dotting the landscape. Nothing moves very fast in Laos, and especially in Vientiane, making it an oasis from the bustle of modern, motorbike-filled South-east Asia. Linger in Vientiane for a few days and let the city grab you by the heart and set you free with a Zen-like zeal.



Raphael Kern, General Manager,
Diethelm Travel Laos

30 DON'T MISS



- **Boun Pi Mai**
April
The Lao New Year.
- **Pchum Ben Festival**
October
Traditional races between Hadxaifong district, Vientiane, and Nong Khai, Thailand.
- **That Luang Festival and Trade Fair**
November
An impressive annual fair and religious festival.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



Diethelm Travel Laos has teamed up with Ock Pop Tok, a socially responsible fair trade textile institution, to launch a number of exclusive excursions showing traditional Lao textile production – from the creation of silk to the weaving process and the meaning of motifs. These hands-on tours introduce visitors to the colourful world of textiles allowing them to

fully experience the creative process and even dye their own scarf. Proceeds from the tours help the organisation's commitment to pay fair wages, ensure safe working conditions and cultivate markets that provide a sustainable source of income for artisans and their communities.

BEST BUYS



An iconic Laotian symbol, a silk *sinh* (Lao-style skirt) and matching scarf are perfect gifts to take home as gifts for family and friends. The garments can be found at Maichan Fine Arts & Handicrafts on Samsenthai Road in Vientiane or Ock Pop Tok at 125/10 Ban Saylom in Luang Prabang.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



Eaten across the country, the Lao national dish known as *laap*, a spicy minced beef salad stuffed with fragrant herbs and seasonings, is a celebratory dish commonly made to mark a housewarming, the birth of a baby or to welcome the New Year. Find *laap* at Kualao Restaurant on Rue Samsenthai or Tha Ngon Restaurant on the bank of Nam Ngum River in Vientiane. In Luang Prabang, try Tamnak Restaurant on Sakkarine Road.



TRIP INSPIRATION

Treasure of Southern Laos

For those searching for a truly off-the-beaten-track journey, Southern Laos offers some of the most seldom visited, yet richly rewarding, travel experiences in South-east Asia. A Reservations Manager who has worked for Diethelm Travel Laos as for more than 10 years advises guests start with the four-day Treasures of Southern Laos tour for an unforgettable experience.



Presented by Bounsou Chaleunsouk

DAY 1

Arrive in **Pakse**, the capital of Southern Laos and drive to the **Bolaven Plateau**, home to dozens of hill tribes, waterfalls, coffee and tea plantations. Continue east to reach the **Sinouk Coffee Resort**, stopping at a Katu textile village along the way.

DAY 2

Head to **Wat Phou**, a spectacular pre-Angkorian temple sitting amid the region's rice fields and waterways before continuing to **Champasak** for the night.

DAY 3

Enjoy a full day exploring **Sipandon**, the famous "4,000 Islands". Take a boat to the peaceful island of **Done Khone** to visit the spectacular **Lippi Falls** on the west coast of the island before heading out on a short boat tour to spot the rare Irrawaddy dolphin. Return to the hotel in Champasak at sunset.

DAY 4

After a leisurely breakfast, transfer back to **Pakse** to complete the tour.

DIETHELM TRAVEL
JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

Call us at (856 21) 316 393 or
visit www.diethelmtravel.com





MACAU

by Prudence Lui



Senado Square © cescassawin-123RF.com ▲

THINGS TO NOTE

- The pipeline of themed resorts around the Cotai Strip will help draw more non-gaming visitors to Macau to enjoy family-oriented products.
- More hotel rooms in the market should spark competition for room occupancy and rates.
- More synergy with sports and cultural events in Macau will lead to diverse offers and an event-full calendar.
- The long-awaited new ferry terminal at Taipa is expected to open soon and contribute to bigger traffic and handling capacity.
- The easing of visa restrictions for mainland Chinese to visit Macau by the Chinese Government may revive flagging numbers as this segment dominates over 60 per cent of total arrivals.

OVERVIEW

Macau suffered a drop of 3.5 per cent in arrivals in 1H2015.

According to the Macau Government Tourist Office (MGTO), arrivals from Greater China (mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan) comprised around 90 per cent of the total numbers, and visitors from that region decreased by three per cent to 13.4 million.

MGTO is hopeful of maintaining a similar level of visitors for the remaining six months of 2015.

Another important factor is that fewer high-rollers are arriving from China as the central government continues to tighten the screws on corruption.

This downturn is all the more painful for Macau this year because it is opening another wave of new integrated resorts aimed at grabbing the attention of travellers and transforming the destination into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.

These new draw cards include non-gaming elements in Galaxy Resort Phase 2 development and Broadway Macau, which opened in May, followed by cinema-

themed Studio City due to be opening its doors in October 2015.

It is no surprise that hotels remain cautious on occupancy and room rate predictions given more than 3,000 new rooms have boosted supply.

As a result, occupancy of all types of hotels dipped sharply in 1H2015. Five-star hotels suffered the most with an 8.6 percentage point drop in occupancy, whereas room rates for three-star hotels took a big hit translating into a drop of 15.2 per cent and falling from MOP\$1,250 (US\$157) to MOP\$1,060 compared to the same period last year.

Worsening this situation were unfavourable external factors like competition from neighbouring countries with a weakened currency such as Japan and Korea. As a result, the industry is painting a gloomy picture for the rest of the year and has adopted a wait-and-see attitude for business in 2016.



The ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral ▲

MACAU IN NUMBERS



14,756,499

Total visitor arrivals in 1H2015, a drop of 3.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2014

76.7

In billions of Macau patacas (US\$9.6 billion), visitor expenditure in 1H2015, a sharp decline of 36.9 per cent



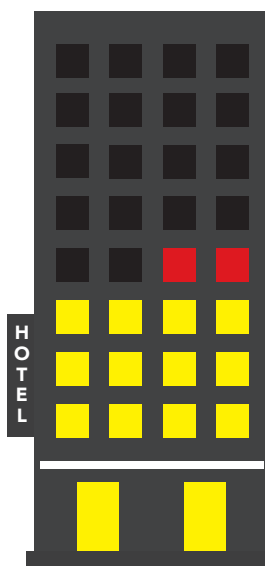
2.78

In millions, the number of passengers handled in 1H2015 by Macau International Airport, a year-on-year increase of 6.6 per cent thanks to the addition of four new routes and three new airlines launched



8.6

In percentage points, the drop in occupancy rate among five-star hotels between January and July 2015, while the average room rate slid 1.7 per cent to MOP1,847.60 (US\$231.50) compared to the same period last year



106

The number of hotels as of June 2015 and an inventory of 30,370 rooms. A total of 53 projects are expected to add another estimated 25,900 rooms to the city

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“Macau will show a modest increase in available seats in 2016. This is mostly due to growth from Air Macau while other carriers are a mixed bag of growth and contraction. Airlines have yet to find Macau a viable alternative to an increasingly congested Hong Kong.

Will Horton,
senior analyst-North Asia, CAPA

“We foresee promising growth in the family and leisure traveller markets with the completion of new attractions and cross-regional transportation infrastructure in Macau. We seek to capitalise on these opportunities by expanding our urban adventures including Asia’s highest Climbing Wall (32m) and a myriad of delectable culinary options including our recently opened Portuguese restaurant, to create multi-dimensional experiences for visitors.



Rogier Verhoeven,
executive director, Shun Tak Holdings

“As President Xi Jinping mentioned during this keynote speech at the 2015 BOAO Asia Development Forum in March, Macau is also included to join the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives. Macau will therefore make good use of its focal efforts and utilise the opportunity to boost the synergy from culture, sports and tourism, and this will help to push the city towards being a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.

Helena de Senna Fernandes,
director, Macau Government Tourist Office



“Year 2015/16 will be interesting for Macau if all projects open as planned, as an inventory of about 9,000 additional rooms will come online. The question is how will the market absorb the new openings. This could have a very positive impact but could also be a challenge especially in the first six months after the launch of these new offers. The length of stay could be increased which would be a positive.

Josef Dolp,
vice president of operations, Hong Kong, Taiwan,
Macau and Korea, Starwood Hotels & Resorts

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Gentrification of Rua da Felicidade

A cluster of two-storey buildings in red in Rua da Felicidade was once a prostitute hub and is now home to various restaurants as well as shops.

2. Culinary paradise for all budgets

Although a small enclave, Macau is home to 357 restaurants and the flourishing culinary scene has resulted in 11 Michelin-starred restaurants and 13 Bib gourmand restaurants which offer exceptional good food at moderate prices.

3. Popularity of Portuguese egg tart grows

The Portuguese egg tart is a must-eat local snack and the signature Lord Stowe bakery in Coloane has spread its footprint downtown to malls like the Sands Shoppes at The Venetian Macao.



▲ Governor Nobre de Carvalho Bridge © elwynn-123RF.com



Deluxe King Room at the St. Regis Macao (left), Studio City (centre), Climbing Wall, Macau Tower ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

Wynn Palace

Opening early-2016

Steve Wynn's second luxurious integrated resort in Macau is a US\$4.1 billion floral-themed development, where guests are transported in air-conditioned SkyCabs that traverse a 3.2-hectare Performance Lake.

The resort features a 28-storey hotel with 1,700 exquisitely furnished rooms and suites, large-scale floral displays, superbly designed gaming spaces, versatile meeting facilities, an opulent spa and salon, renowned luxury retail and gourmet dining outlets.

Wynn, chairman and CEO of Wynn Resorts, made his foray into the city with the Wynn Macau in 2006.

Planet J, Macau

Opening 2H2016

Dubbed the world's first player-centric live-action-role play theme park, it is a pioneering family entertainment concept.

Players and the park are connected by a mobile device called Magic Scroll which is mobilised gear that connects to over 200 whimsical games.

Even when players have to leave, the adventure does not stop as progress is saved so that players can pick up where they left off. Situated at the Shoppes at Cotai Central, the park is over 8,361m² in size.

Experience Macau's Communities

Bus Highlight Tour

Launched August 2015

The Macau Government Tourism Office has soft-launched a bus tour which runs circular routes connecting points across the eight walking tour routes of Step Out, Experience Macau's Communities.

These encompass different themes and go through parishes in historical parts of Macau, Taipa and Coloane. Hopping on and off the bus, visitors, for example, can visit different neighbourhoods and attractions in the World Heritage-listed The Historic Centre of Macau.

St Regis Macao

Opening end-2015

The 400-room property situated in Cotai Central features guestrooms and suite sizes ranging from 53m² to 477m².

Its signature 24-hour butler service called Allow Me has been a hallmark of the St Regis experience for more than 100 years. It will be a first for any hotel in Macau.

Its diverse dining experience reflects a modern Asian residential lifestyle, and the St Regis Bar has its own twist on the Bloody Mary cocktail, born at the flagship St Regis New York in the early 1900s.

Climbing Wall, Macau Tower

Opened January 2015

Thrill seekers can climb Asia's highest wall standing at 32m erected outside of the Macau Tower's concrete shaft.

It is fun for individuals and groups of all ages with experienced staff providing coaching throughout the whole process. For more experienced or avid climbers, Lead Climbing can be made available on a case-by-case basis.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Air Macau

Tel: (853) 8396 6888

Website: www.airmacau.com.mo

Macau Government Tourist Office

Tel: (853) 2831 5566

Website: www.mactourism.gov.mo

Travel Industry Council of Macau

Tel: (853) 2833 6611

E-mail: andykkwu@yahoo.com.hk

Macau Hotel Association

Tel: (853) 2870 3416

Website: www.macauhotel.org

Macau Travel Agency Association

Tel: (853) 2871 8829

E-mail: myt@macau.ctm.net



MALAYSIA

by S Puvaneswary

THINGS TO NOTE

- The recovery of regional economies will have a positive impact on Malaysia's tourist arrivals – where over 70 per cent are from ASEAN – and on average spend.
- In 2015, Malaysia Airlines cut several unprofitable routes and underwent a major restructure to stem losses. Its recovery and network expansion in 2016 are vital for the industry – dependent on it to attract MICE and leisure traffic from medium and longhaul destinations – to thrive.
- From October 2015, Malaysia is offering temporary social passes, up to 15 days per entry, for Chinese groups who use travel agents registered with the Tourism and Culture Ministry, and is expected to boost arrivals in 2016.
- Hotels and resorts on the East Coast may close if the year-end monsoon season flash floods return in 2016. Tourists may avoid Malaysia altogether thinking the entire country is affected.
- In 2015, Tourism Malaysia cut its advertising and promotion budget by 25 per cent, or RM50 million (US\$12 million), of a total budget of RM200 million, a result of tumbling oil prices. A smaller budget will affect overseas promotions, less awareness about the destination and may impact arrivals negatively in 2016.

Traditional Malaysian food © yuliang11-123RF.com ▲

OVERVIEW

For the Malaysia Year of Festivals year-long campaign, the destination is targeting 29.4 million tourist arrivals, an increase from the 2014 total of 27.43 million.

However, results were dismal in 1Q2015, where there was a decline of 8.6 per cent over the same period in 2014. Tourist arrivals in 1Q2015 was 6.48 million, compared to 7.09 million for the same period in 2014.

Mirza Mohammad Taiyab, director-general, Tourism Malaysia, said flooding in several states this year and the two almost back-to-back Malaysia Airlines tragedies in 2014, were factors that contributed to the drop.

The top 10 generating markets for 1Q2015 were Singapore, Indonesia, China, Thailand, Brunei, India, the Philippines, Japan, the UK and Australia. Of these markets, only Brunei and India grew, at 3.3 per cent and 2.5 per cent respectively, while all other markets declined.

At press time, statistics were available only for 1Q2015.

While the weakened ringgit should make the destination more attractive to foreign visitors, tour operators and hoteliers said this has not been the case. Several negative occurrences this year such as the arrests of Islamic State activists, the earthquake in Sabah, kidnappings in Sandakan in May and political tensions have had a negative effect on tourism.



Kite-maker in Kota Bharu © udeyismail-123RF.com ▲

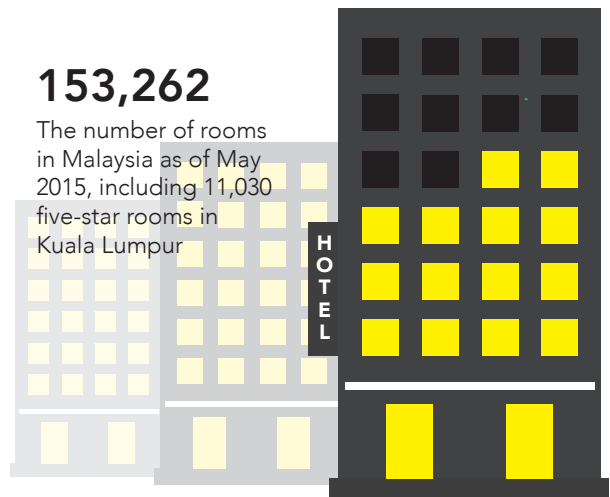
MALAYSIA IN NUMBERS



10 | The number of ports of calls, which received 199,725, passengers in 1Q2015

153,262

The number of rooms in Malaysia as of May 2015, including 11,030 five-star rooms in Kuala Lumpur



6,482,696

Arrivals in 1Q2015, a decrease of 8.6 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2014



4.9

In billion ringgit, tourist expenditure on shopping in 1Q2015, an increase of 10.8 per cent compared to the same period in 2014

2,700.70

In ringgit, the 1Q2015 average per capita expenditure of foreign tourists an increase of 3.5 per cent over 1Q2014

The reduction in air connectivity will also impact tourism.

Malaysia Airlines suspended flights to Frankfurt, Kunming, Krabi and Cochin this year. From September 1, Malaysia Airlines will also reduce frequencies on the Kuala Lumpur-Delhi route from twice daily to once a day.

Among foreign carriers, Air France suspended its flights between Paris-Charles de Gaulle and Kuala Lumpur from October 26.

The devaluation of the renminbi in August will not have much effect on Chinese arrivals to Malaysia as the ringgit has dropped significantly. On August 14, it slumped to its weakest level in 17 years and reached a historic low of 4.03 ringgit against the US dollar.

The slide in the renminbi also had a knock-on effect resulting in the devaluation of the Indonesian rupiah, and the Australian and New Zealand dollars falling to six-year lows on August 12.

Going forward, arrivals from Indonesia and Australia, both in the top 10 arrival markets, are bound to be affected by the devaluation of their respective currencies, and impact tourist spend in Malaysia.

Next year is also expected to be a difficult one as major markets for Malaysia such as China, Indonesia and Central Europe are being affected by weak economies. Arrivals from the Middle East will depend on political stability in that region.



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KJLIJ 0976/2014

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



Resort World Genting's Fox World Theme Park, scheduled to open in 4Q2016, will fuel international tourism into Malaysia. We expect Fox World Theme Park to become a "must visit" for an estimated two billion new middle-class tourism sector consumers from emerging markets. This theme park will be the jewel in the crown for the tourism landscape in Malaysia, if not for the region!

Chow Wei Heng,
vice president, marketing, Resorts World Genting

With the uncertainty of economic conditions around the globe, we will definitely see an increase in domestic travel within the country and regional travellers from neighbouring Singapore, Indonesia and nearby regions. Sheraton Imperial Kuala Lumpur Hotel will offer experiential packages for family and leisure travels into Kuala Lumpur to attract these markets.



Winnie Choo,
director of sales & marketing,
Sheraton Imperial Kuala Lumpur Hotel

The weakened ringgit will attract more inbound tourists in 2016 as Malaysia offers good value for money. Travellers who plan their holidays will also enjoy savings from airlines, which usually offer promotional rates during the low season.

Kn'ng Yee Pei,
manager, sales central region, Malaysia Airlines

A game changer for the Iskandar Malaysia region in Johor will be the strengthening of the Family Fun Holiday Destination with the opening of new theme parks, in particular the Austin Heights Water Park providing attractions for the young and weekend warriors.



The opening of additional shopping malls will enhance the shopping experience and for the avid golf tourists, there is the opening of the 27-hole Els Club at Desaru Coast. There will certainly be more to see, explore and do in Iskandar Malaysia in 2016.

Mohammad Rosly Md Selamat,
senior vice president, economics & investment,
Iskandar Regional Development Authority

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Malaysia's numbers game

Do not be surprised if lifts in some buildings in Malaysia skip the fourth floor and the lift panel is numbered 3, 3A and then 5, or jumps from level three to level five. Blame the confusion on superstitious building owners avoiding the number four as it sounds like the word death in Chinese.

2. Aligning to the same time zone

Local time in Malaysia has been adjusted eight times and the last was made on January 1, 1982 so that it is the same in West and East Malaysia. Prior to this adjustment, Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia were half-an-hour ahead of Peninsular Malaysia. Incidentally, Singapore also moved its clocks 30 minutes ahead on Jan 1, 1982. Today, Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei are an hour ahead of its neighbours such as Indonesia and Thailand.

3. Good place for playing hide-and-seek

The Sarawak Chamber at Mulu National Park in Sarawak, East Malaysia, takes pride in being the world's largest known underground cave chamber. Measuring 600m in length, 435m in width and with a maximum height of 115m, it is capable of accommodating 40 Boeing 747 aircraft.



▲ Langkawi Art of Paradise 3D Museum

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

Langkawi Art of Paradise 3D Museum at Oriental Village

Opened January 2015

This 3D museum at Oriental Village in Burau Bay showcases more than 100 interactive 3D paintings in a three-storey building divided into nine zones.

The museum has an exhibition space of nearly 2,000m² and the exhibits are divided into nine themed zones with names such as Optical Illusion, Aquarium, Safari, Egyptian, Ancient Palaces and Scenery.

This 3D museum has received recognition as the largest 3D museum in Malaysia by the Malaysian Book of Records.

The St Regis Langkawi

Opening November 2015

The St Regis Langkawi is situated within an idyllic cove close to Kuah town, Langkawi's shopping and commercial centre.

The resort will include 85 well-appointed suites and three water villas, each offering a spectacular view of the Straits of Malacca. Each guestroom will also feature the signature St Regis Butler Service. Trained in the English tradition, St Regis butlers provide discerning guests with round-the-clock customised services, anticipating each guest's every need.

G Hotel Kelawai

Opened February 2015

G Hotel Kelawai is located at a prominent location on bustling Jalan Kelawai, noted to be one of the busiest streets in Penang.

Jalan Kelawai is famous for a diverse array of attractions ranging from traditional temples and local eateries to upscale restaurants, boutiques and jewellers. It is also a mere two-minute walk from its sister property, G Hotel Gurney.

Facilities at the 208-key G Hotel Kelawai include a 24-hour fully equipped gym, business centre, infinity pool and three F&B outlets.

Simba Hill Gourmet Hall

Opened May 2014

Simba Hill Gourmet Hall at Bukit Gambang Resort City in Pahang is a safari-themed restaurant.

A glass wall separates the restaurant from a lion enclosure, giving diners a close-up view of a male white lion and two female lionesses roaming freely.

This restaurant can seat up to 750 people and the venue set-up can include a stage for short speeches and presentations.



Style Redefined

G HOTEL KELAWAI, PENANG



G Hotel Kelawai, is where iconic design and cutting edge lifestyle set the stage for exclusive and extraordinary experiences. With 208 rooms, the hotel is uniquely inspired by innovative design to create energizing space for guest to work or play, be it day or night. Strategically located next to upscale shopping malls, renowned hawker eateries and nearby to tourist attractions, UNESCO world heritage sites and beaches, G Hotel Kelawai is the place to explore, discover and enjoy.




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MALAYSIA

NEW

Mud, our story of Kuala Lumpur

Open until 2017

Mud, our story of Kuala Lumpur, is a must-watch musical celebrating the spirit of Kuala Lumpur city and the people who built it with hopes and dreams.

Set in 1880 during the flourishing tin mining industry, this interactive show provides opportunities for the audience to participate with the performers as the story unfolds.

This 50-minute live performance is shown twice daily at 15.00 and 20.30, except on the second and fourth Monday of every month. Tickets are available at www.mudkl.com or at the counter at Panggung Bandaraya, Jalan Raja, Kuala Lumpur from 10.00 to 21.00. Agent bookings can be made via booking@mudkl.com.



District 21 (middle), Mud, our story of Kuala Lumpur ▲

KL Horse & Carriage Ride

Opened March 2015

The open-air carriages drawn by beautiful Friesian horses will take visitors past the old parts of the city with buildings dating back to the 1800s. It begins and ends at KL City Gallery. Each ride is 20 minutes and is for up to four people.

District 21

Opened December 2014

District 21 is a 6,503m², post-apocalyptic themed action adventure park.

Located in a 17m air-conditioned atrium, within IOI City Mall, Putrajaya, it comprises 11 adventure attractions and eight function rooms. It is an ideal venue to hold corporate team building functions, school groups and birthday parties.

Nobu Kuala Lumpur

Opened May 2015

Located on Level 56 of Menara 3 Petronas in the iconic KLCC development, Nobu Kuala Lumpur offers innovative Japanese cuisine, which is complemented with stunning views of the world-renowned Petronas Twin Towers and of Kuala Lumpur's skyline.

The restaurant features modern Japanese design and a sophisticated yet casual ambience. Spanning 1,150m², Nobu Kuala Lumpur's main dining area and sushi bar can accommodate up to 200 guests.

Nobu, which also houses two bars, a stunning lounge, and private dining rooms, is open for lunch Mondays to Fridays, 12.00 to 14.00, and for dinner Mondays to Saturdays, 18.00 to 22.30.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Malaysia Airlines

Tel: (60 3) 7843 3000

Website: www.malaysiaairlines.com

Malaysia Airports Holdings

Tel: (60 3) 8777 7000

Website: www.malaysiaairports.com.my

Tourism Malaysia

Tel: (60 3) 8891 8000

Website: www.tourism.gov.my

Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents

Tel: (60 3) 9222 1155

Website: www.matta.org.my

Malaysian Association of Hotels

Tel: (60 3) 4251 8477

Website: www.hotels.org.my

The Malaysia Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers

Tel: (60 12) 640 6106

Website: www.maceos.com.my



SPOTLIGHT ON MALAYSIA



with **DIETHELM TRAVEL**

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

In a country as culturally diverse as Malaysia, there is always something to celebrate and never has this been more true than in 2015 – Malaysia’s Year of Festivals.

Featuring unique celebrations encompassing traditional culture, sport, art, music and more, the country’s captivating spirit draws travellers from around the globe.

PRODUCT NEWS

Recent growth and tourist-centred initiatives have spurred an increased interest in this fascinating country and Diethelm Travel Malaysia has launched 25 product offerings catering to all travel styles and preferences. Including family adventures, nature treks, cultural excursions and more, the tours offer true journeys of a lifetime – including exclusive off-the-beaten-track Vespa and Harley Davidson adventures.

The country’s luxury scene is also expanding with two highly anticipated St Regis properties opening in Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

An enchanting destination known for its exotic environment, endangered wildlife and local tribes that still respect time-honoured customs, Borneo is uniquely positioned for the Diethelm Distinctive tour offerings from Diethelm Travel Malaysia. While exclusive homestays in the Iban longhouses of Sarawak or exhilarating jungle safaris are popular among adventurous travellers, another way to discover this fascinating region on a local level is through specially designed cycling tours that guide travellers through indigenous villages. The company’s Kuching Cycling Tour: The Kampong Ride package, for example, takes visitors on a memorable journey to discover the hidden gems

of Kuching – the Malay kampongs, or villages, lining the banks of the great Sarawak River. Throughout the journey, guests experience first-hand how the kampong families live by visiting traditional wooden stilt houses, filled with stories of times gone by and exploring the vibrant open-air market of Kuba Ria. An excellent opportunity to interact with the local people and shop for native handicrafts, the market is a colourful affair full of life and activity including plenty of stalls selling fresh produce from the jungle, vibrant plants and tropical flowers. You cannot get more local, or off-the-beaten-path, than this!

I RECOMMEND...

Ipoh is still fairly unknown to most tourists but growing in popularity thanks to its unique geography situated among water and earth, mountains and lakes. Located halfway between Kuala Lumpur and Penang, the capital of Perak state offers travellers a range of excursions and sightseeing. While the elegant city is recognised by its charming colonial architecture, it is really the friendly community, outstanding food scene and stunning surroundings that stand out. For adventurous explorers, try renting a Harley Davidson motorcycle and ride along the coastline of this historic town – certainly one of the most invigorating ways to see the city!



Manfred Kurz,
Managing Director,
Diethelm Travel Malaysia

30 DON'T MISS



- **Gawai Dayak & Pesta Kaamatan**
June 2016
Indigenous harvest festivals.
- **Hari Raya Puasa Aidilfitri**
July 2016
The end of Ramadan when even the sultan opens his home to visitors.
- **Kuching Rainforest World Music Festival**
August 2016
Showcasing international and local musicians.
- **F1 Malaysian Grand Prix**
September 2016
An international F1 race.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



When it comes to sustainable tourism in Malaysia, there are a number of CSR initiatives focusing on preserving the country's rare ecosystems and wildlife. Travellers can participate in local programmes that allow them to interact closely with the environment and endangered animals. From long-term volunteer projects, such

as the 15-Day Matang Wildlife Volunteer Programme in Sarawak, where guests work to improve the lives of Borneo's iconic orangutans, to specially designed one-day excursions including the Kiulu Bicycle Ride where travellers cycle through a rural environment without disturbing its delicate nature, responsible tours play an important role in Malaysia's tourism landscape.

BEST BUYS



With massive shopping centres in Kuala Lumpur and a wide selection of traditional handicrafts, Malaysia is a shopper's paradise. Locally produced goods can be found throughout the country including Borneo pearls or intricate batik textiles, often manufactured in Penang, while delicious strawberry tea can be purchased in tea plantation shops.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



Visitors to Malaysia will never go hungry! Don't miss Baba Nyonya dishes including *ayam pongteh* (miso soy chicken), *laksa lemak* (noodles in spiced coconut soup) or *rojak* (exotic Malaysian salad). Inherited from the region's distinctive mix of cultures, particularly Chinese descendants, Baba Nyonya cuisine is unique to the

country. Try the Old China Café in Kuala Lumpur, Kucik Kitchen in Melaka or Auntie Gaik Lean's Restaurant in Penang to taste some of these mouthwatering creations.

TRIP INSPIRATION

Malaysia's Heritage UNESCO Trail



An experienced Diethelm Travel Malaysia Product Manager recommends visitors take part in the week-long Heritage UNESCO Trail tour to discover some of Malaysia's most intriguing sites.

Presented by Laura Struyven

DAY 1 Kuala Lumpur – Malacca
Arrive in **Kuala Lumpur** and immediately travel to the historic city of **Malacca**, once a thriving centre of trade and a major meeting point where East meets West.

DAY 2 Malacca – Kuala Lumpur
Spend more time in fascinating **Malacca** before heading back to the country's capital.

DAY 3 Kuala Lumpur
Tour the historic heart of Kuala Lumpur, covering many famous colonial-era landmarks clustered in a charming area surrounding **Merdeka Square**.

DAY 4 Kuala Lumpur – Ipoh
En route to Ipoh, stop at the **Sam Poh Tong Cave Temple** housing impressive Buddha statues. Spend the rest of the day discovering the city's **Old Town**, packed with historic buildings featuring classic colonial architecture and a vibrant food scene with numerous nightly hawker centres.

DAY 5 Ipoh – Taiping – Penang
Explore **Taiping**, meaning eternal peace, Perak State's foremost historic town.

DAY 6 Penang
Experience the unique, historical city of **Georgetown** in Penang, home to world-famous street food culture.

DAY 7 Penang
After breakfast, transfer to **Penang Airport**.

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THE MALDIVES

by Feizal Samath



Sea bungalow ▲

THINGS TO NOTE

- A new law on foreign land ownership is expected to see wealthy Saudi investors and Chinese companies invest in mixed-used projects catering to travellers from those markets.
- The Maldives is the 2016 host country partner at ITB Berlin. Its brand and destination campaigns in 2016 are aimed at China, Europe and emerging markets like Brazil and North America.
- China, the strongest source market, suffered hiccups in early-2015 but is expected to recover by year-end. In 2016, higher arrivals are expected from the Middle East, India and North America and will compensate for any lower growth from China.
- A new bridge connecting Male International Airport and the capital Male, and ready in two to three years, will improve access and cut travel time and business costs.
- The increase in no-frills hotels and guesthouses will make the Maldives more budget friendly. The government's showpiece guesthouse project on Baresdhoo Island on Laamu Atoll, opening in 2017, will offer 2,100 budget rooms. Many small budget accommodations already exist and more are being planned.

OVERVIEW

There were a few hiccups this year in Chinese arrivals, the main source market for the Maldives, but the government says it expects to reach targeted arrivals of 1.4 million this year, including an increase in Chinese visitors.

Chinese arrivals recorded negative growth in June owing to economic issues back home connected to the stock market crash and the devaluation of the yuan. However, the industry says the market is set to recover in the next few months and there will be a growing Chinese presence in the Maldives with Chinese investors building an integrated resort catering mainly to Chinese visitors.

The planned construction of a three-kilometre bridge, connecting the capital Male with and the adjoining Hulhule island where the international airport is sited, is also expected to lift the destination.

The main focus of the authorities in 2015/16, however, is a mega brand and destination campaign across the world targeting 1.5 million arrivals in 2016 with 365 days of free holidays for lucky visitors, an international whale shark festival and mega weddings as part of an ambitious Visit Maldives Year 2016 campaign.

Hussain Lirar, Maldives deputy tourism minister, said exciting things are happening in the next 12 to 18 months with the country lined up as the 2016 host country partner at ITB Berlin, taking place in March.



Clownfish and anemone ▲

MALDIVES IN NUMBERS



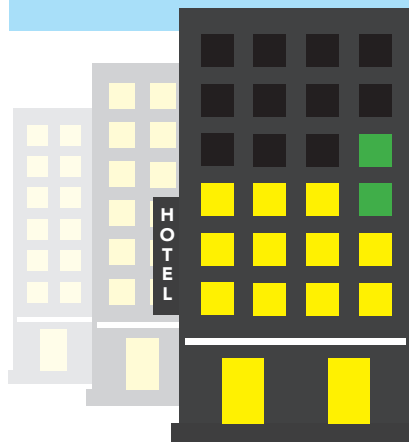
1,204,857

Total number of visitor arrivals in 2014 compared to 1,125,202 in 2013



363,626

The number of Chinese visitors in 2014 compared to 331,719 in 2013



26,891

Total number of beds in 2014 compared to 26,161 in 2013



34

The latest available information on the number of scheduled and chartered airlines operating to the Maldives in 2013 compared to 32 in 2012

He said many campaigns and roadshows are being planned in 2016 to coincide with Visit Maldives Year 2016. Promotions will target emerging markets like Brazil and the Americas along with continuing work in China, the Middle East, India and Europe.

Maldivian authorities have also spoken of ambitious plans to garner a million tourists annually from China alone in the coming years.

Industry officials add they are urging an increase in frequencies between China and the Maldives.

New laws passed in July 2015, permitting foreigners to own land according to new parliamentary legislation compared to earlier rules where land was available on long term leases, is aimed at attracting Chinese and Middle East investors.

However, this would only apply to those who invest more than US\$1 billion and provided 70 per cent of the land is reclaimed from the sea or lagoons.

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination

2016 will be a special year for the Maldives with the launch of the Visit Maldives Year 2016 campaign and the Maldives being the host country partner at ITB Berlin 2016. We have planned to aggressively market the destination worldwide to achieve the target of 1.5 million tourists next year. This year we are taking part in 19 international trade fairs while roadshows were held in nine countries in 1H2015, with this year's promotion campaign costing US\$4.5 million.



Mohamed Adam,
deputy managing director,
Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation

At Tourist Submarines Maldives, we operate the largest deep diving passenger submarine – the *Whale Submarine* – in the world's best-known underwater paradise. We sell an experience, a luxury seat to see the vivid brilliance of the underwater world and a briefing by a marine biologist. *Whale Submarine* in collaboration with Save the Beach Maldives is launching a coral plantation in October 2015. When visitors board our state-of-the-art submarine they can choose a coral piece to be donated to the Indian Ocean. This will then be planted by an eco-certified diver onto the reef while guests watch and relax inside the luxury submarine.

Hussain Aiman,
marketing manager, Tourist Submarines Maldives

MEGA Maldives Airlines is on the verge of launching exciting new routes at the end of 2015 and in 2016. These would include significant markets in the Indian subcontinent, North Asia and Africa. We will also resume operations to Kuala Lumpur and Jeddah at the end of this year. In late-2016, we plan to commence direct flights to three points in Europe as well as additional points in Asia. MEGA will be announcing soon the induction of new aircraft with the expectation of growing the fleet to eight or nine wide-body aircraft by the end of 2016.

George Weinmann,
CEO, MEGA Maldives Airlines



While the Maldivian tourism authorities have worked hard over the years to position the Maldives as a premier tourist destination, it is important that Maldives tourism retains this positioning and pricing by regulating the developments. With new entrants, stiff price competition can be envisaged, which will naturally drive down the returns unless the demand for the destination is sustained.

Susith Jayawickrama,
joint managing director,
Aitken Spence Hotels, Sri Lanka and the Maldives

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Meeting underwater to make a point

In October 2009, dressed in full scuba gear, the Maldives cabinet of ministers held a 30-minute meeting underwater, the first in the world, to attract global attention to the dangers of global warming. Scientists have warned that this nation of over 1,000 islands with beautiful coral reefs and white sand beaches could go under water in less than 100 years.

2. Unique options to dive for

Overseas tourists can organise an idyllic wedding or renew their wedding vows at the Ithaa underwater restaurant at Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, or at the Anantara Kihavah's exclusive underwater restaurant and wine cellar called Sea.

3. Golf in the Maldives

The Maldives has at least three golf courses on resort islands, with Velaa Golf Academy at Velaa Private Island, designed by famed golfer Jose Maria Olazabal, being among the best. The six-hole Kuredu Golf Club at Ihaviyani Atoll and the nine-hole course at the Shangri-La hotel on Vilingili island are the other options.



▲ Conrad Maldives Rangali Island's underwater restaurant Ithaa



Male, capital of the Maldives ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what's new

Kunaavashi Island Retreat & Spa

Opening end-2016

A five-star boutique resort mainly catering to Chinese guests, the Maldives' largest source market, this is China's first resort development in the country.

The joint venture, with Beijing's Guangdong Beta Oceans and Maldivian partners, is building the resort to be outfitted with modern facilities. It is located at Kunaavashi Island in Vaavu Atoll and work was due to start in September 2015.

New bridge connecting Male and the international airport island

Opening 2017/18

Travel from the Male International Airport to the capital Male, a distance of a little over three kilometres, now takes about 10 to 15 minutes by ferry.

The new bridge connecting Male with the neighbouring island of Hulhule, where the international airport is located, will not only cut travel time but also makes it safer when the sea is rough and travel by boat is not possible. Costing US\$300 million, with a third coming from Chinese aid, designs are due to be ready by mid-2016 with construction starting in late-2016.

Cruise ship linking the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Kerala

Launched October 2015

Travellers now have the option of visiting all three destinations during a week-long adventure. Handled by the Colombo-based Herbilan Cruises Lanka, the cruise is a seven-day/six-night trip based on the Colombo-Kochi-Maldives-Colombo return routing.

Transformation of Nasandhura Palace

Opening 2016/17

When completed, it will be another addition to the growing infrastructure of high-class rooms for business visitors to the capital Male. The 34-year old landmark Nasandhura Palace Hotel is being transformed into a 150-room, four-star hotel with 100 serviced apartments by Sri Lanka's Browns Group and local Maldivian partners.

Integrated resort with 2,100 rooms on Baresdhoo island

Opening late-2017

This showpiece guesthouse project on Baresdhoo island on Laamu Atoll is intended to provide rooms with associated facilities that are cheaper than the four- to five-star rates the Maldives commands.

Mainly catering to budget travellers, a new source the country is trying to tap, the mixed development project is located on 72 hectares. The project was earlier planned on Thumburi island on the same atoll but changed this year to Baresdhoo as this island is not only bigger but is also just 10 minutes to the nearby domestic airport compared to 20 or 30 minutes from Thumburi.

The project will increase total room strength in the Maldives by 10 per cent and include a string of small hotels and guesthouses with limited facilities, while services like restaurants, shops, entertainment centres and diving facilities will be provided by independent operators.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Ministry of Tourism

Tel: (960) 302 2200

Website: www.tourism.gov.mv

Maldives Airports Company

Tel: (960) 332 3506

Website: www.macl.aero

Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation

Tel: (960) 332 3228

Website: www.visitmaldives.com

Maldives Association of Tourism Industry

Tel: (960) 332 6640

Website: www.matimaldives.com

Maldives Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators

Tel: (960) 334 4929

Website: www.matato.org

Mega Maldives

Tel: (960) 300 6670

Website: www.megamaldivesair.com

Liveaboard Association Maldives

Tel: (960) 330 0640

Website: www.liveaboardassociation.mv



SPOTLIGHT ON THE MALDIVES

with

DIETHELM TRAVEL



JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

With nearly 1,200 islands, each boasting white sand beaches and views of clear turquoise waters, it is no surprise why the remote nation of the Maldives draws more than a million visitors a year. Now, there is an even better, more authentic way to experience this tropical paradise...

PRODUCT NEWS

OBLU by Atmosphere is a stylish four-star resort that recently received a comprehensive remodel of its 116 villas and suites on Helengeli Island. Built with the value traveller in mind, the resort provides an all-inclusive experience for a hassle-free stay. Meanwhile, the new Outrigger Konotta Maldives Resort is partnering with a leading island dive centre, Best Dives Maldives, to offer a wide selection of innovative marine holiday activities emphasising marine knowledge and conservation.

disappoint. The resort's diving centre also guarantees the highest level of training, guidance and equipment and even offers customised diving excursions for thrill seekers.

Additionally, the hotel spa features comprehensive treatments highlighting ancient Ayurveda techniques to soothe the mind, body and soul for total well-being. Of course, experiencing the resort is made all the more special thanks to its dedicated and friendly staff that strive to make guests feel right at home.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

In an area where luxury resorts reign supreme, it is easy to spend a holiday in the Maldives without ever really experiencing the true nature of the region. At the Barefoot Eco Hotel however, the property prides itself on being part of an actual Maldivian community, instead of being situated on its own private island, providing guests with the rare opportunity to interact with the local people in a more authentic setting.

The entire resort has been created with minimal impact on the island following the philosophies of sustainability and conservation, even housing an on-site conservation centre staffed with its own resident marine biologists. For those looking to learn more about the island's underwater world or to experience world-class snorkelling, the expert staff at the centre will not

I RECOMMEND...

To get up close and personal with the region's wildlife, join a hotel snorkelling excursion to Turtle Cove from the Barefoot Eco Hotel. Guests will find a feeding ground for hawksbill sea turtles and enjoy the unique opportunity to snorkel with these amazing creatures that are often found here in higher concentrations than surrounding areas.

Additionally, guests can join the Conservation Centre's dolphin monitoring programme as the centre's team leads boat trips to gather data on the marine mammals that inhabit the atoll. The data is then shared with other organisations to collectively assess the health of the dolphin populations.



Howard Brohier, General Manager,
Diethelm Travel the Maldives

30 DON'T MISS



Eid ul-Fitr

July 2016

Also called Feast of Breaking the Fast or Hari Raya Puasa, the start of the festival usually falls on the first day of the month after the holy month of Ramadan. There will be celebrations, parades, concerts, shows and parties held in the capital city of Male and throughout the Maldives.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



The Barefoot Eco Hotel is not the only property supporting green travel – the exclusive Soneva Fushi pioneered the trend for an environmentally responsible lifestyle. Offering luxury villas and residences on a lush private island surrounded by a Biosphere UNESCO-protected coral reef, the property emphasises the principles of “slow life” – sustainable, local, organic, wellness,

learning, inspiring and fun experiences – in everything it does with considerable care going into carbon mitigation and energy efficiency. The hotel brand is also committed to locally sourcing ingredients for its restaurants, producing many of its own food products such as cheese, cured meats and fair trade chocolate.

BEST BUYS



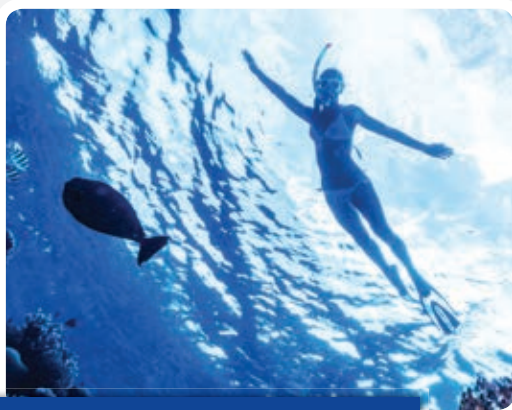
When it comes to shopping, pick up some handicrafts that will remind you of your time in the Maldives such as native lacquer products or a *dhoni* replica – an intricate miniature model of the traditional Maldivian boats. Woodcarvings of all types, from beautiful boxes to decorated masks, are also popular.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



Impressive buffet breakfasts, lunches and dinners are served at the Barefoot Eco Hotel's main sea-view restaurant featuring a selection of international and local dishes with ingredients coming from local suppliers. At each meal, the resort's two Italian chefs, who specialise in Mediterranean cuisine, present their dishes and ensure guests are aware of any potential dietary or allergy

concerns. Special seafood menus can be arranged for private and romantic dinners.



TRIP INSPIRATION

A Journey through Ari Atoll

Having worked in the Maldives for more than five years, the Head of Reservations at Diethelm Travel Maldives believes there is no better way to experience the magic of the destination than going on a week-long cruise.



Presented by Shareek Rasheed

DAY 1

Get ready for an experience of a lifetime and set sail on the boutique *Yasawa Princess*, moored just a 20-minute boat ride from Male International Airport.

Cruise each day to a fabulous new destination covering **four different atolls** around the Maldives. Rise with the sun, enjoy intriguing excursions to nearby islands or diving deep into the clear waters below, and appreciate nightly sundowners with your fellow cruise mates while watching the sun set over the Indian Ocean.

DAY 2-6

DAY 7

Alight at the island of **Dhidhoofinolhu** then spend a couple nights at the **LUX* South Ari Atoll**, offering an unmatched opportunity to indulge unspoiled island living. Here, a spontaneous atmosphere provides delights at every turn with everything from impromptu cinema screenings on the beach, to pop-up musical performances, to a lagoon ideal for snorkelling and whale shark spotting. Head back to **Male International Airport** via a romantic and scenic seaplane ride.

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MYANMAR

by Thandi Eain

THINGS TO NOTE

- On July 1, 2015, Myanmar launched its eVisa system to nationals of 51 countries who enter via Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw International Airports.
- MasterCard and Myanmar's Myanma Apex Bank (MAB) have joined hands to launch a prepaid service called the MAB Travel Prepaid MasterCard. MasterCard has also developed prepaid services with Co-operative Bank, Kanbawza Bank, Ayeyarwady Bank and Myanmar Citizen Bank with 2C2P.
- Construction of the Hanthawaddy International Airport in Bago, set to begin in 2016 and completed by 2020, will replace Yangon International Airport as the primary gateway to Myanmar.
- The Tourism Development Bank is being set up. Investor recruitment, selling of shares, organising and participating in tourism-related events have all been pre-approved by the government.
- KLM Royal Dutch Airlines is planning to launch a direct flight between Amsterdam and Yangon early next year.
- VietJet, with flights to Thailand, Cambodia and Singapore is planning to fly to Myanmar soon.

Temples at Bagan ▲

OVERVIEW

In 2014, Myanmar saw the start of enormous growth in the tourism sector, and accelerated momentum is expected to continue in 2015.

Myanmar received 3.05 million foreign tourists in 2014, up 49.5 per cent, compared to 2.04 million in 2013. The US\$1.14 billion in tourism revenue collected in 2014 broke the 2013 record of US\$926 million.

Of the 3.05 million tourists who visited Myanmar in 2014, 70 per cent were from ASEAN member countries, followed by Europe, in particular the UK and Germany.

The tourism industry accounted for 4.2 per cent of GDP and is credited for creating about 6.5 per cent of the total job opportunities.

The new tourist arrival target for 2015 is now set at 4.5 million to five million and Myanmar is eyeing over 7.5 million tourists by 2020 according to Myanmar Tourism Master Plan.

Recent tourism earning have encouraged the authorities to anticipate annual tourism receipts to certainly reach US\$10 billion by 2020.

Despite major flooding in August 2015 affecting 12 out of Myanmar's 14 states and regions, key tourist spots like the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon and cultural heritage sites such as Bagan and Inle Lake were not affected.



U Bein Bridge © masterlu-123RF.com ▲

At press time, the upcoming elections are expected to have a positive effect, while the floods may have the opposite effect. However, limited air access, infrastructure and high tour prices are continuing to keep a lid on visitor numbers.

The industry says Myanmar should invest in a creative global marketing campaign, with the focus on differentiating its tourist offerings from those of its neighbours, adding that the government should also focus on human capital development as good service means repeat business.

Recognising the need for international standard hotels funded by overseas investors, the government is implementing laws and policies to encourage foreign market growth. With hundreds of colonial properties in Yangon in need of restoration, opportunities exist for the right investors to collaborate on hotel, restaurant, and retail projects.

Projects include the Secretariat Building, and the Yangon Railway Office Redevelopment, which will be downtown Yangon's largest commercial development.

MYANMAR IN NUMBERS

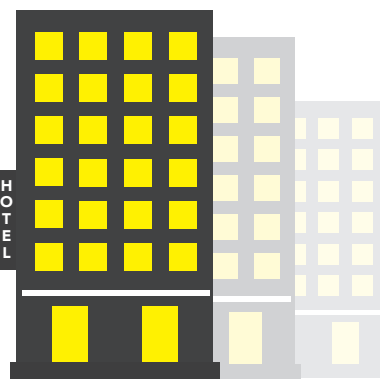


1.14

In billion US dollars, Myanmar's tourism earnings in 2014 compared to US\$926 million in 2013

3

In billion US dollars, total local and foreign investment in the tourism sector in 2015



1,076

The number of hotels in Myanmar as at October 2014. Two-thirds are in Yangon (279), Mandalay (329) and Shan State (200)

3.05

In millions, the number of international visitor arrivals to Myanmar in 2014, an increase of 49.5 per cent compared to 2013



447,520

The number of visitors who arrived via Yangon International Airport from January to May 2015, compared to 410,444 during the same period last year. Asians accounted for 312,645, or more than 70 per cent of arrivals. The largest group with 68,652 visitors arrivals hailed from Thailand, followed by China with 43,546 and Japan with 35,799. Europeans accounted for 81,221 visitors, led by France with 18,113 and followed by the UK with 16,789

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“The expected tourist volume for 2015 by the government and tour business is five million. With the increase in tourists, there are many requirements in the human resources and infrastructure sectors in Myanmar. Therefore, the ministry attaches high importance to addressing barrier-free tourism in the new ASEAN tourism strategy. Myanmar’s Tourism Master Plan and its policies on Responsible Tourism

and Community Involvement in Tourism will be used as a roadmap to shape the future development of tourism in Myanmar. All those policies are in line with ASEAN’s tourism policy.

U Htay Aung,
minister of hotels and tourism

“Foreign tourist traffic to Myanmar is up by around 20 per cent. Next year, more are expected. We have to peg our strategy to that. Our new 737 will allow us to expand our network to international markets and offer an even better experience for our passengers. Investing in new technology aircraft such as the 737 will ensure Myanmar National Airlines continues to be the pride of the country and positions us for future success. I am really glad that the Department of Civil Aviation is actively cooperating with private airlines to move things faster than ever. The government must take airport infrastructure development more seriously.

U Than Tun,
managing director, Myanmar National Airlines

“Hotel reservations decreased a bit in August 2015 because of the flooding and the coming election, and traffic from Thailand was affected by the Bangkok bombing. With more international chains entering Myanmar and needing skilled hospitality staff, we are now providing training for the major tourist attractions. There are over 20 tourism and hospitality schools, mostly based in Yangon and Mandalay.

U Kyaw Myo Aung,
head lecturer,
Kandawgyi Hotel and Tourism Training School

“Very few or nearly no new hot destinations are coming up in 2015 compared to 2014. One of the possible reasons is that almost all new investments in tourism infrastructure are committed at current hot destinations. The development boost is good for tourism but can have a negative impact on nature, the environment, society and culture. But if we fail to add new attractions, it could hamper attracting repeat visitors.

U Khin Soe,
managing director, Interconnection Travels and Tour

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Read the world's largest book

The world’s largest book is located in the compound of Kuthodaw Pagoda – a Buddhist stupa at the foot of Mandalay Hill in Mandalay, Burma.

Worried that the teachings of Buddha may be lost with the invasion of the British in the region, King Mindon conceived the idea of preserving the entirety of the Tipitaka Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism by inscribing them in huge stone slabs

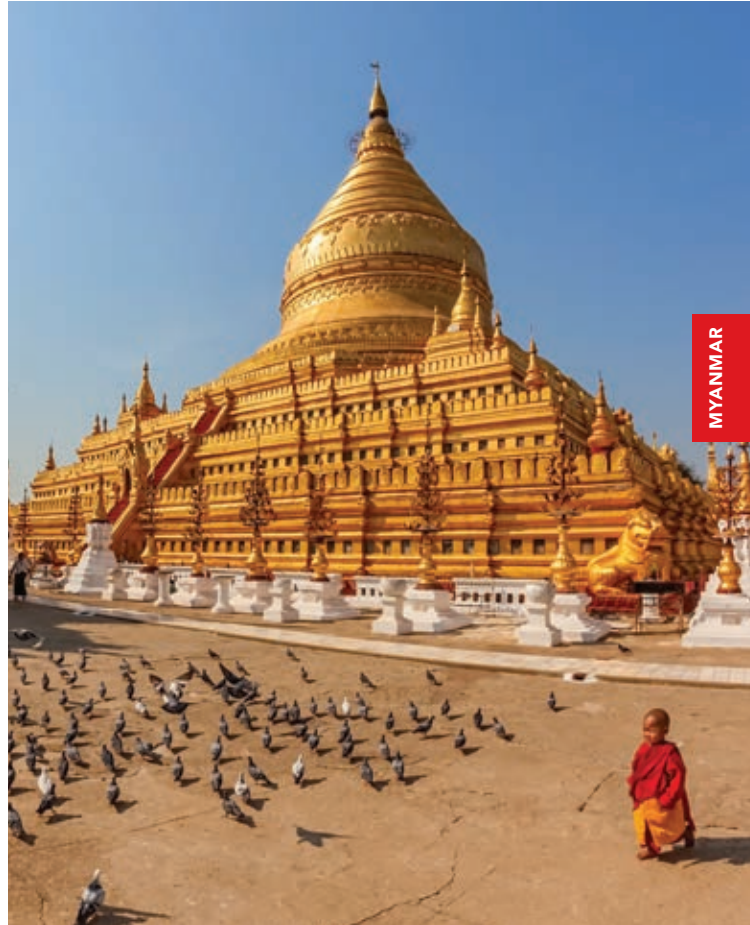
2. Balancing act in Inle Lake

Fishermen who prowl the lake in their small wooden boats and fish by scooping the water with conical-shaped fish traps use a special technique that dates back to the 12th century.

Standing on one leg in the narrow stern of the boat, a leg-rower fisherman wraps his other leg around an oar and, with a circular movement, propels his boat forward

3. Ringing bell record

Mingun Bell, at almost five metres and weighing 55,555 viss, a Burmese measurement equivalent to 90 tonnes, is the largest ringing bell in the world. Located in Mingun, Sagaing Region, it is approximately 11km north of Mandalay on the western bank of the Irrawaddy River.



▲ Shwezigon Pagoda © 19815062-123RF.com



Novotel Yangon (left), Bagan Palace (centre), High Court in Yangon ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what is new

National Museum

Opened August 2015

The new National Museum in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar's capital, has opened to the public. It is divided into five sections but only A and B are open to the public. The museum houses the Primate and Fossil Exhibition, Hall of Prehistory, Hall of Early History, Myanmar History Hall, Myanmar Arts Hall and Myanmar Performing Arts Hall.

It is open daily from 09.30 to 16.30 daily except Mondays and government holidays.

Novotel Yangon Max

Opened May 2015

The 366-room Novotel Yangon Max is within 15 minutes by car from the centre of Yangon.

Amenities include two ballrooms and several F&B outlets – The Square offering international cuisine, the Royal Pavilion Chinese restaurant and the French Restaurant with a magnificent view of the famous Shwedagon Pagoda. The hotel's four bars are The Lounge, The Studio, Time Out and the Pool Bar.

Rooms at the 16-storey hotel start at US\$160 a night.

Yangon Walking Tour

Launched September 2014

Yangon Heritage Trust offers three routes covering the essential attractions of the city such as Bogyoke Aung San market (Scott Market), Sule Pagoda, City Hall, the High Court, the former Burma Railways Company – one of the oldest administrative buildings in Yangon, the former headquarters of the legendary Irrawaddy Flotilla company, the Armenian Church, Gandhi Hall and the Secretariat where General Aung San and cabinet ministers were assassinated in 1947.

Each tour costs US\$30 per person.

Elephant Ride in Bagan Palace

Launch date pending

Bagan Myanmar Company is waiting for good weather to move the elephants from Taungu to Bagan to kick off the new elephant ride sightseeing tour around Thiri Zayar

Bumi Bagan Palace compound. Each ride will cost US\$5 per person.

A special elephant shed will be built close to Bagan Palace without affecting the ancient heritage surroundings of Bagan.

Sheraton Yangon Hotel

Opening 2017

Located in the Tamwe Township, near Kandawgyi Lake, the new-build Sheraton Yangon Hotel will have 375 rooms outfitted with signature brand amenities.

They include Shine Spa for Sheraton™, three dining venues, and recreation facilities ranging from a swimming pool to a state-of-the-art Sheraton Fitness® centre.

The hotel will also have 1,880m² of function space.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Ministry of Hotel and Tourism

Tel: (95 67) 406 129/406 130/406 460

Website: www.myanmar-tourism.org

Department of Civil Aviation

Tel: (95 1) 533 015/533 016

Website: www.dca.gov.mm

Myanmar National Airlines

Tel: (95 1) 378 603/377 840

Website: www.flymna.com

Myanmar Tourism Federation

Tel: (95 1) 855 1012

Website: www.myanmar.travel

Myanmar Tourism Marketing

Tel: (95) 9502 9602/9502 9603

Website: www.tourismmyanmar.org

Union of Myanmar Travel Association

Tel: (95 1) 214 941/214 945

Website: www.umtanut.org



SPOTLIGHT ON MYANMAR



with

DIETHELM TRAVEL

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

In this Golden Land, ancient Buddhist temples fascinate travellers as the kindness of the Burmese people permeates all interactions. A country rich in history, tradition and culture, Myanmar is also on the brink of tremendous growth – perfectly poised for exploration and offering exceptional travel experiences unlike anywhere else.

PRODUCT NEWS

Travelling through Myanmar has never been easier thanks to the recent rise of domestic airlines such as Myanmar National Airlines, Myanmar Apex and Air Mandalay that provide a number of accessible and affordable routes across the country. New luxury cruise liners, including The Strand Cruise, have recently launched journeys along the mighty Ayeyarwaddy River and hot air ballooning is also available now within the Inle Lake region, offering guests truly memorable flights.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

One of the latest Diethelm Distinctive programmes features a two-day hiking excursion from Kalaw to the Sintuang Nepalese village. Your tour starts at the Kalaw Hill Lodge, a new hotel with a new concept: a beautiful lodge, a farmhouse, an organic garden and lush mountain gardens make this place unique. From here we first go to Kalaw where we take the train bound for Thazi for a short ride. You will alight at Singtung, a village located 1349m above sea level and predominantly inhabited by a Nepalese community. It was originally established by the British for the Gurkha soldiers. Look back into the past while visiting a 100-year-old Nepalese temple, old railway station and hilltop pagoda

that offers stunning views of the valley below before enjoying a Nepalese meal and cultural performance. Further connect with nature by walking to Hin Kha Gone. Myanmar's unspoilt surroundings are legendary and here, while passing through tropical and primary forests, or stopping at a calm reservoir originally built by the British some 80 years ago, travellers can be one with nature and simply unwinding in its welcoming tranquillity.

I RECOMMEND...

Myanmar cannot be fully experienced by racing through an itinerary. Stay an extra day in each major city and take time to wander down the busy streets soaking up the scene – sit down in a teashop, chat with the street vendors and stroll through a bustling market. The old town of Yangon is particularly interesting but often less visited than cities like Mawlamyine, Hpa An and Taunggyi. The neighbourhoods offer fantastic insights into local Myanmar life, especially when discovered with the help of Diethelm Travel Myanmar's private guides who escort guests through the maze of local culture and tradition.



Lilli Saxer, Managing Director,
Diethelm Travel Myanmar

30 DON'T MISS



- **Phaungdaw Oo Pagoda Festival**
October
The festival celebrates five famous Buddha statues kept at the pagoda.
- **Mathoe Robe Weaving Contest**
November
Weavers compete to create robe offerings to Buddha.
- **Naga New Year**
January
Held at Lahe Village, Khamti.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



Diethelm Travel Myanmar strongly believes in supporting and promoting trusted partners and service providers that are actively striving toward sustainable tourism offerings such as water saving activities, community projects, recycling or energy conservation initiatives.

The company's Sustainability eBook introduces savvy travellers to the real

eco-warriors, who practise what they preach on the subject of responsible travel. The features range from resort groups to independent accommodation, schools and education programmes, wildlife projects and local community support initiatives.

For example, the extremely worthwhile projects E4Y and CVT teach disadvantaged Myanmar youth to be self-sufficient and to be able to support their families through employment opportunity.

BEST BUYS



While in Bagan stop by Myanmar Boutik, a socially conscious shop featuring products created by village women taught at ActionAid Vocational Training Centre. Using resources from surrounding villages, the artisans create the unique merchandise by hand. Here travellers can directly support the women's income and improving their quality of life.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



Teashops are an integral part of daily culture and life throughout the country. The RTH, a trendy boutique teahouse in Yangon, fuses the city's rich street food tradition and authentic recipes with high quality ingredients and expert preparation. Try the popular organic *mohinga*, a savoury rice noodle and fish soup where fried beans and red onion patties are served with each generous bowl.

TRIP INSPIRATION

Fascinating Land of Padaung

Loikaw only recently opened to tourists and offers a rare look into the culture of ethnic minority groups as well as incredible natural scenery.

Our English- and French-speaking guide, passionate traveller and keen photographer recently travelled to Loikaw, capital of the Kayah State, known as the home of the Padaung, or "long neck", women.

He says the following tour offers a truly authentic experience.



Presented by Thomas (Swun Pye Lynn)

DAY 1

Heho – Nyaung Shwe

Arrive at **Nyaung Shwe**, the gateway to Inle Lake and explore the town.

Nyaung Shwe – Loikaw

DAY 2

Drive to **Loikaw**, stopping along the way at an interesting **limestone cave** and **Pa O** ethnic villages before touring the highlights in Loikaw.

DAY 3

Loikaw

Spend the day visiting the Padaung village of **Pan Pat** for an inside look at their way of life including traditional hunting and weaving. Do not forget to taste the home-made glutinous rice wine – a local speciality!

Loikaw – Phekon – Inle Lake

DAY 4

Enjoy a boat tour to the iconic **Inle Lake** visiting pagodas, learning how the Inhar tribe weaves textiles from silk and lotus threads, stopping at silver workshops, floating gardens and more.

DAY 5

Inle Lake

Leave for **Heho Airport**.

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DIETHELM
TRAVEL



THE PHILIPPINES

by Rosa Ocampo



The main street of El Nido in Palawan © outcast85-123RF.com ▲

THINGS TO NOTE

- The Philippines needs to build more airports, roads, seaports, hotels and resorts, and to improve telecommunications to cater to the growing number of tourists.
- There is volatile geopolitics between the Philippines and China, its fourth biggest market. Their unresolved claim over the Scarborough Shoal islands in the South China Sea has led to dips in travellers from China several times in recent years.
- While the country's accessibility has improved substantially in recent years, more direct flights are needed from Europe to Manila, more services to secondary gateways like Cebu, Boracay and Palawan and more domestic flights.
- The country must improve the effectiveness of international marketing and promotions to create awareness of and interest in the Philippines.
- The perception that the Philippines is comparatively expensive compared to other Asian destinations might ease as more hotels and resorts are being opened and more foreign carriers are mounting more flights to the country.

OVERVIEW

More tourists are visiting the Philippines but not as many as expected. That is why the 2015 arrivals target was revised down to 5.5 million, the original target for 2014.

The good news though is that tourists are staying longer in the Philippines, nine to 11 days on average, and are spending more.

The numbers are expected to increase at a faster rate as the country's inadequate tourism infrastructure is being remedied on a scale never seen before.

International hotel brands continue showing their confidence in the Philippines, taking aim not only in metro Manila but in secondary and resort destinations as well.

Apart from newcomers Nobu, Crown Towers, Aqua Boracay, Raffles, Fairmont and Novotel, the Philippines is also set to welcome brands like Conrad, Okura, Grand Hyatt, Hilton, Savoy, Crockfords Tower, M Gallery, Sheraton, Westin, more Marriotts, Mövenpicks, Shangri-Las and Dusit Thani in the next few years.

The destination missed out in not addressing the severe air traffic congestion at Manila's single runway Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA). What the capital needed even years ago is a much bigger airport.



Banaue Rice Terraces © jonaldm-123RF.com ▲

A small consolation is the sprucing up of passenger Terminal 1 and the opening of Terminal 3 to foreign airlines.

Elsewhere, airports are either being built, expanded or improved in secondary gateways like Cebu, Bohol, Caticlan in Boracay, Palawan, and Bicol.

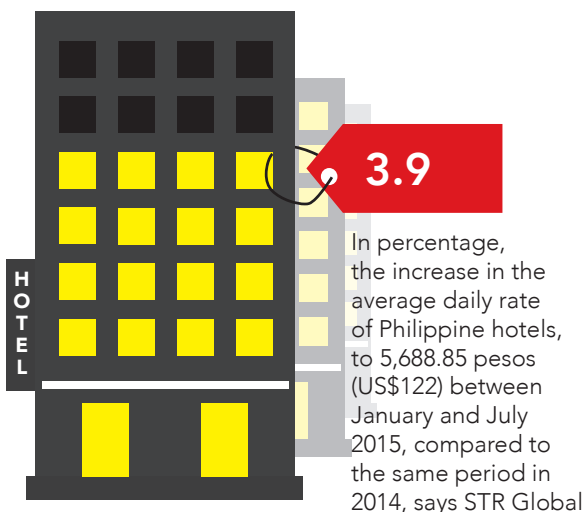
The country's road systems are also undergoing a makeover, including the ongoing construction of the expressway that will link NAIA to various points in metro Manila.

Major ports for cruise ships are also under scrutiny. Many islands are accessible only by sea transport, hence the need to improve the quality of the ports and the inter-island ships and ferries.

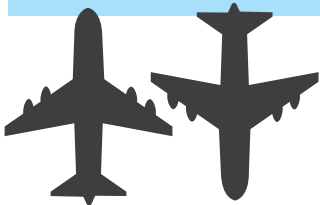
PHILIPPINES IN NUMBERS



67.6
In percentage, the average occupancy rate of Philippine hotels between January and July 2015, 0.7 per cent less compared to the same period a year ago according to STR Global



4,612
The number of new hotel room keys in Manila in 2015



43
The number of airlines operating to and from the Philippines



9.03 | In percentage, the increase in arrivals to 2,980,130 between January and July 2015, up from 2,733,367 for the same period a year ago

IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“ASEAN integration may spur more intra-regional travel and low-cost carriers will continue to fuel growth. More flights will improve accessibility but limited airport capacity may constrain demand. Hoteliers have to be creative to win business due to increased room supply, while innovation and productivity are essential to keep the Philippines competitive.

Odette Huang,
group director of sales & marketing
The Discovery Leisure Company, Inc



Human resource is a big plus for the Philippines. We are still the best in customer service and we speak English. Another plus is our varied attractions, from heritage sites and dive spots to theme parks, resorts and world-class hotels for MICE. However, airports and accessibility can improve. Also Internet connectivity in some cases is very slow. We are top notch in social media like Facebook and Twitter, which we can use to spread good things about Philippine tourism.

Marisa Alana,
president, Philippine Exhibits and Theme Parks Corp



A lot of good things are in store for Visit The Philippines Again 2016. We are giving out incentives, good packages and good rates in collaboration with airlines and the private sector. For example, Cebu Pacific will offer air fares of less than US\$100 from Australia to the Philippines. New products and new destinations are game changers too. Community-based tourism, diving, sports and adventure are on the list of new products and we are pushing for new exciting destinations like Siargao and Bicol. For these, accessibility is important. We really need more airline seats.

Susan del Mundo,
chief, marketing and promotions,
Tourism Promotions Board



The share of foreign tourist arrivals to provincial international airports in addition to Laoag, Cebu, Davao and Clark will grow. Kalibo and Iloilo have already shown the way with air direct services. The star in 2016 will be Caticlan, gateway to Boracay and scheduled to open to international flights in 2016, where its runway has been lengthened and terminal capacity increased. I foresee Bacolod, Laquindangan, Puerto Princesa, Tacloban and Cagayan joining the rank of true international airports.



Avelino Zapanta,
president & CEO, South East Asian Airlines International

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Tricks of the tide

The Philippines has 7,107 islands that vary in size greatly, from Luzon, the biggest and most populous, to small, uninhabited isles in Visayas and Mindanao that disappear during high tide.

2. Nation of linguists

The Philippines has more than 100 dialects and languages but English is widely spoken as is Tagalog, which originated in Manila. Taglish is an easy-to-learn combination of English and Tagalog words.

3. Underwater majesty of the Philippines

The Philippines is in the Coral Triangle, the centre of marine biodiversity in the world.

The archipelago has rich and diverse coastal and marine life including coral reefs, marine species and marine mammals, many not found anywhere else in the world.

The Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in Sulu Sea and Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park in Palawan are on the World Heritage list. On the tentative list of the World Heritage are: Apo Reef Natural Park in Occidental Mindoro, El Nido-Taytay Managed Resource Protected Area in Palawan, Coron Island Natural Biotic Area in Palawan and Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary in Tawi-Tawi.



▲ Scuba diver swimming over a large anemone © whitcomberd-123RF.com



Asian Cancer Institute (left), The Manila Hotel staff in period costume ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what's new

Asian Cancer Institute

Inaugurated July 2015

Located in Alabang in Manila, the first fully integrated cancer facility in the Philippines is a one-stop multi-disciplinary cancer prevention and management centre.

It offers state-of-the-art cancer treatment facilities, including the most advanced radiotherapy equipment. There is one price for locals and foreigners and it is accredited by foreign medical insurance companies.

The Institute is within the Asian Hospital and Medical Center, a tertiary hospital accredited by the Joint Commission International, the world's most prestigious accrediting body for healthcare organisations.

Experience Philippine Marine Wildlife in their Natural Habitat

Launched June 2015

Interact with marine wildlife including dugongs, whale sharks, giant turtles and rays through customised tours recently launched by Kirschner Travel Manila and its non-profit, Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines.

The guides are marine wildlife experts and the chosen ecotourism destinations, including Donsol in Sorsogon as well as Tubbataha Reef and Busuanga in Palawan, have community-based sustainable tourism programmes.

PWD Tour of Manila

Launched early-2015

A Philippine first, the tour is customised for people with disability (PWD) and Blue Horizons Travel and Tours uses PWD-friendly vans to transport travellers around Manila's attractions, including the Walled City of Intramuros and nearby destinations like the highlands of Tagaytay.

The van can carry two people in wheelchairs, two additional lightweight wheelchairs that can be folded and secured and two seats for companion/caregivers. There is also a special holder for a small oxygen tank.

City of Dreams Manila

Opened June 2015

The namesake of Melco Crown Entertainment's luxe integrated resort in Macau, Manila's newest integrated resort boasts extensive gaming facilities, three hotels – Crown Towers, Hyatt and the first Nobu hotel in Asia – with 930 keys.

There is also the DreamPlay by DreamWorks interactive play centre for children, world-class Chaos and Pangaea nightclubs, other entertainment venues, MICE venues, upmarket shops and restaurants.

Art in Island

Opened December 2014

It is a 3D art museum in Manila's Quezon City filled with more than 50 fun and irreverent murals painted by a team of Korean master painters.

The artworks give an optical illusion of depth so that visitors can "jump" into the painting and become part of it. For the selfie generation, this is an entertaining way to interact with art and have fun posing for quirky photos.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Philippine Airlines

Tel: (63 2) 879 5601

Website: www.philippineairlines.com

The Department of Tourism

Tel: (63 2) 459 5200 to 5230

Website: www.tourism.gov.ph

Philippine Travel Agencies Association

Tel: (63 2) 831 0124/904 9280

Website: www.ptaa.org.ph

Philippine Tour Operators Association

Tel: (63 2) 812 4513

Website: www.philtoa.com

Cebu Pacific

Tel: (63 2) 702 0888

Website: www.cebupacificair.com



SINGAPORE

by Paige Lee Peiqi



Singapore city skyline at night © 9moshi-123RF.com ▲

THINGS TO NOTE

- Singapore is extending the validity of visas issued to Chinese nationals to a maximum 10 years, a move that is set to boost arrivals.
- The opening of the National Gallery Singapore, the world's largest public display of modern South-east Asian art, will attract art enthusiasts.
- The first-ever multi-million dollar tripartite collaboration – between Royal Caribbean International, STB and Changi Airport Group, which runs between 2015 and 2018 – has been set up to attract record numbers of overseas fly-cruise guests.
- Singapore Pinacothèque de Paris marks the first expansion outside Europe of the renowned private art museum, placing the Lion City in the international spotlight.
- The sharp appreciation of the Singapore dollar against the Australian dollar and Malaysian ringgit in recent months, hitting multi-year highs, may turn tourists from those markets away.

OVERVIEW

To reverse slowing tourism figures, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) launched a S\$20 million (US\$14.8 million) global marketing campaign to ride the wave of international interest in the nation's Golden Jubilee year, marking 50 years of independence.

From May to December 2015, visitors will be offered a range of promotional air fares, hotel stays, retail offerings, dining deals and discounted admissions to attractions.

As of May 2015, Singapore welcomed 6.07 million international visitors, a year-on-year increase of 1.1 per cent compared to 2014. For 2015, STB is projecting overall international visitor arrivals of between 15.1 million and 15.5 million, or zero to three per cent growth compared to 2014.

Juliana Kua, director, strategy & planning, STB, said: "We believe Singapore remains well-positioned to leverage the opportunities and will see growth in both tourism receipts and visitor arrivals.

"At the same time, we do expect some of the headwinds to persist, such as weakening currencies in some of our key markets. Hence, STB and the tourism industry have intensified efforts to attract more visitors," she added.

To broaden Singapore's reach, STB is also expanding its marketing efforts to more tier-two cities of key source

markets such as China, Indonesia and India.

In June 2015, Singapore Airlines, Changi Airport Group and STB announced a two-year partnership to strengthen tourism in Singapore, the largest collaboration among the three partners to-date.

The partners will invest S\$20 million to boost the Singapore experience to leisure, business and MICE visitors in more than 15 markets worldwide through the refinement and delivery of the Singapore experience to travellers coming to and through Singapore and Changi airport.

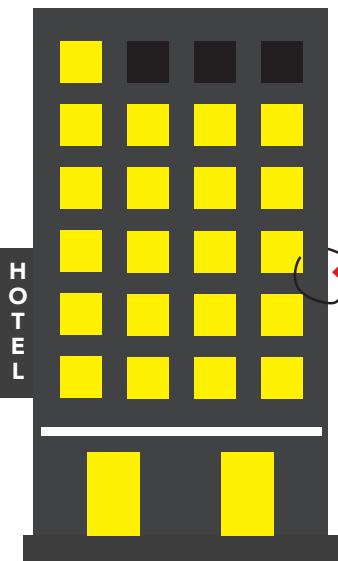
The Singapore Stopover Premium package, an upgraded version of the Singapore Stopover Holiday, for example, was introduced. Targeted at premium leisure and business travellers, it includes stays in select five-star hotels inclusive of breakfast and Wi-Fi Internet connection, priority check-in services and private transfers, and privileges such as spa discounts or shopping vouchers, and access to leisure experiences across the island.

Another key feature is the enhanced Free Singapore Tour, which takes transit passengers to see Singapore's landscape, heritage attractions and city skyline.



▲ National Museum of Singapore © duoduo-123RF.com

SINGAPORE IN NUMBERS



85.5

In percentage, the average occupancy rate in 2014, a 0.9 per cent dip compared to the previous year

257.70

In Singapore dollars, the average room rate in 2014, a drop of 0.2 per cent compared to the previous year



4,672,832

Air arrivals from January to May 2015, a 4.1 per cent year-on-year decrease



719,052

Arrivals by land access from January to May 2015, a 10.8 per cent year-on-year decrease

6,073,074

The number of visitors Singapore welcomed from January to May 2015, a 4.1 per cent year-on-year decrease



1,077,459
The number of Indonesians who visited Singapore from January to May 2015, a 13.6 per cent year-on-year dip, but is still Singapore's largest source market

SINGAPORE



Hotel Re! @ Pearl's Hill

Re!Lax in Modern Retro Comfort

A modern retro themed boutique hotel that channels the groovy 60s and 70s, Hotel Re! @ Pearl's Hill is your ideal urban getaway from the hustle and bustle of the city whilst being just a stone's throw away from attractions like Chinatown, Clark Quay and the famous shopping district, Orchard Road. Located within 10 minutes walk from Outram Park MRT Station, free shuttle bus transport service is also available upon request for the convenience of our guests.

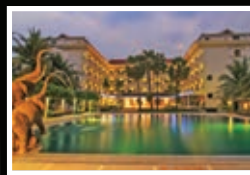
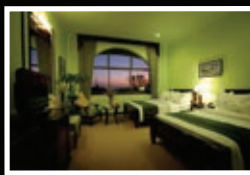
As you step into Hotel Re! @ Pearl's Hill. you are lost in swirls of vivacious colours and psychedelic furnishings tempered with a sleek modern touch. With 12 storeys and 140 rooms, Hotel Re! @ Pearl's Hill is a wonderful surprise waiting to be discovered.

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IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“The announcement of the first-ever multi-million dollar tripartite collaboration between Royal Caribbean International, STB and Changi Airport Group, which runs between 2015 and 2018 to attract overseas fly-cruise guests to Singapore is projected to generate over S\$100 million (US\$70 million) in tourism receipts. This is estimated to pull in over 170,000 overseas visitors, or projected growth of over 50 per cent.

Juliana Kua,
director, strategy & planning,
Singapore Tourism Board



We are creating a new product, probably the first in Asia that offers this kind of a lifestyle choice. With high occupancies in Singapore, we are a serious choice for all segments, be it MICE, bleasure, leisure, etc. Most new hotels that are opening are smaller. We have 654 rooms and are directly connected to Suntec Singapore via an overhead bridge.

Aloysius Lee,
CEO, South Beach Consortium



“The Singapore experience will be incomplete without visiting the National Gallery Singapore. It will be more than a museum; it will be a fascinating destination that appeals to visitors of all ages. As the newest visual arts institution in the world that houses the largest public collection of modern art from Singapore and South-east Asia, we will create an experiential journey for visitors to discover and be immersed in the richness and diversity of art in this region. Beyond that, we will highlight the importance of modern South-east Asian art in a global context so that conversations about art histories can transcend geographical boundaries.



Chong Siak Ching,
CEO, National Gallery Singapore



“STB has appointed Journeys Pte Ltd under a three-year contract to operate and manage Haw Par Villa, an attraction of significant heritage value to our nation, and one that is steeped in our history. With Journeys' expertise in heritage-based tours in Singapore, we believe that they will be able to enliven Haw Par Villa with interesting concepts that will appeal to both locals and tourists, while conserving the integrity of the park.

Ranita Sundramoorthy,
director of attractions, dining and retail,
Singapore Tourism Board

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Also known as the Lion City

Singapore was originally known as Temasek, meaning sea town in Javanese. Later, in 1299, an Indonesian king who visited the island and mistook an unknown creature for a lion named it Singapura, which is Sanskrit for Lion City. Yet, it is known lions never lived on the island. Today, the Merlion is Singapore's mascot.

2. Treasure trove at Bukit Timah Hill

Visit the Bukit Timah Hill to feast on the sanctuary of trees. The highest point in Singapore stands here at the top of the hill at only 164m high. Yet, it contains more species of trees than the entire North American continent.

3. Hail the king of fruit

Singaporeans love their durians, otherwise known as the king of fruit. Head to Geylang where stalls selling durians are plenty along the street.

To pick a good durian, sniff along the seams or split lines of the fruit. If it has no smell, chances are it is not ripe. If it smells really strong, chances are it is overripe.



▲ The Merlion © vincentstthomas-123RF.com



Bread Street Kitchen (left), Lee Kong Chian National History Museum (centre), Puss in Boots' Giant Journey ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what's new

The Singapore Cable Car Sky Network

Launched July 2015

A new Sentosa Line, an extension of the existing Mount Faber cable car line, was officially launched in July 2015. Together, the two lines form the Singapore Cable Car Sky Network.

Guests who wish to ride on both lines can buy a Cable Car Sky Pass with the option to top up for unlimited rides. Overseas guests enjoy a bonus as the new Sentosa Line will be included in the new Standard Sky Pass with no increase from the current price of S\$29 (US\$21.20).

Bread Street Kitchen

Opened August 2015

Internationally renowned chef Gordon Ramsay has brought his culinary magic to the table at The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands. Set in an industrial warehouse-designed restaurant and bar, the two-storey Bread Street Kitchen, which opened in June, is modelled after its London counterpart, serving a British European menu with fresh seasonal produce.

Its signature dishes include Pork Belly, Shepherd's Pie, Roasted Veal Carpaccio and the BSK Burger, featuring melted Monterey Jack cheese and spicy sriracha mayo on a brioche bun. The restaurant has a total seating for 149 people, and includes a 14-seat private dining area.

Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

Opened April 2015

Home to over a million plant and animal specimens, the seven-storey 8,500m² museum in the National University of Singapore's Faculty of Science is the city's first and only natural history museum.

There are more than 2,000 specimens, divided into 15 zones, in the exhibition gallery. The main gallery showcases the history and biodiversity of plants and animals and Singapore's natural history and treasures are in the heritage gallery. Tourists can buy tickets from Sistic at S\$20 for adults and S\$11 for children.

The Patina, Capitol Singapore

Opening 4Q2015

Patina Hotels & Resorts has launched its inaugural property in Singapore. The group's six-star flagship 157-key hotel – The Patina, Capitol Singapore – is part of an integrated development located in the heart of Singapore's downtown at the junction of Stamford Road and North Bridge Road.

Housed in the restored Capitol Building and Stamford House, the upmarket, mixed-use Capitol development is being built by Capitol Investment Holdings for S\$750 million (US\$608 million).

It also comprises a 39-unit residential tower, a four-storey luxury shopping mall and a new Capitol Theatre that will be used as a hub for cinema screenings and performance arts.

Puss In Boots' Giant Journey

Opened April 2014

Hop onto the world's first Puss In Boots' Giant Journey suspended coaster and join Puss and Kitty on this anti-gravity, swashbuckling adventure in search of the legendary golden eggs at Universal Studios Singapore.

There is a minimum 100cm height requirement for this two-minute long ride which goes at a maximum speed of 36kph. Universal Studios Singapore park tickets start from S\$68.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Singapore Airlines

Tel: (65) 6223 8888

Website: www.singaporeair.com

Changi Airport

Tel: (65) 6595 6868

Website: www.changiairport.com

Singapore Tourism Board

Tel: (65) 6736 6622

Website: www.yoursingapore.com

National Association of Travel Agents Singapore

Tel: (65) 6534 0187

Website: www.natas.org.sg



SPOTLIGHT ON SINGAPORE



with

DIETHELM TRAVEL

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

Full of life and colour, there is something new to see at every twist and turn in Singapore. Soak up the city highlights, along with the shopping and food scene, before enjoying the region's natural scenery and discovering nearby islands, such as Pulau Ubin, wetland reserves and more.

PRODUCT NEWS

Sentosa island saw many additions in 2015 with KidZania and the new Sentosa Line for Singapore's cable car connecting visitors to a number of attractions on Sentosa, known as the State of Fun. Several hotels on the island have also undergone renovations to keep up with the change.

On the mainland, the Marina Bay vicinity boasts new five-star hotels including The South Beach, a trendy escape, and ultra-luxe The Patina, Capitol Singapore.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

Singapore has a world-class transport system, so what better way to experience it than to go on a city tour using public transport? Guests experience riding on the MRT's driverless automated trains, local buses and even cruising on a bumboat along the Singapore River to see different sides of the city all from a local point of view. After visiting the cultural hubs of Chinatown and Little India, the historical Civic District and the bustling Central Business District, the tour is topped off with a quick

photo stop at the iconic Merlion and Marina Bay before celebrating with a Singapore Sling.

I RECOMMEND...

A visit to the Singapore Botanical Gardens is a must for every traveller to Singapore. In fact, it receives nearly 4.5 million visitors a year. The 156-year-old garden was recently awarded UNESCO World Heritage status and features more than 10,000 species of flora spread over 74ha.

The National Orchid Garden houses the world's largest orchid collection of 1,200 species and 2,000 hybrids including the iconic Vanda Miss Joaquim, Singapore's national flower. Orchids here are so special that Singapore honours visiting dignitaries and celebrities by naming its finest hybrids after them then displaying the flowers in the popular VIP Orchid Gardens.



*Jessalyn Chan, General Manager,
Diethelm Travel Singapore*

30 DON'T MISS



- **The Singapore Food Festival**
July
An annual celebration of local food culture showcasing the diversity of Singapore's culinary landscape.
- **The Singapore Night Festival**
August
A nocturnal extravaganza held in the heart of Singapore's arts and heritage district featuring dance and music performances and installation artworks.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



Diethelm Travel Singapore is committed to keeping the country's rich Peranakan heritage alive through a variety of culture-based excursions such as visits to local craft shops and hands-on classes where visitors can learn traditional Nonya sarong kebaya sewing and how to cook Peranakan cuisine.

BEST BUYS



To remember a wonderful holiday in Singapore, visitors can purchase gold-plated orchids which are unique souvenirs that symbolise the country. These real orchids are plated in 24-karat gold, forever capturing their delicate beauty, and are available from Risis shops around the island.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



Chilli crab is one of Singapore's national dishes and can be found in seafood restaurants all over the island. Traditionally eaten with bare hands to savour the juicy crab meat with its sweet and spicy chilli sauce, the dish is a real treat. One of the best restaurants to sample chilli crab is the No Signboard Seafood Restaurant in Geylang.

TRIP INSPIRATION

Hidden Gem of Singapore



The Operations Manager at Diethelm Travel Singapore shares two of her favourite full-day, eight-hour tours in this off-the-beaten-track itinerary for guests who want to experience a different side of Singapore.

Presented by Carolina Teo

DAY 1

Arrive in Singapore and familiarise yourself with this fast-paced city.

DAY 2

Join the Transformation of Singapore Tour and step into past by taking a bumboat to **Pulau Ubin**, an island often considered the last true *kampong* (village). Upon returning to the mainland, drive through rustic **Changi Village** before proceeding to **Tampines New Town**, a model township. After lunch, head to the Housing Development Board's gallery to uncover Singapore's public housing story through multisensory and self-exploratory exhibits.

DAY 3

Today, experience the Modern Farming in Singapore Tour in the **Kranji Countryside**. Visit the **Qian Hu Fish Farm**, one of the largest ornamental fish traders in the world, to try out the fish spa. Head to **Bollywood Veggies** for a local lunch made from organic vegetables grown on-site before visiting **Frogology**, a local frog farm where guests can handle live frogs.

DAY 4

After a busy couple of days, enjoy a relaxing time at the hotel or continue to your next destination.

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SRI LANKA

by Feizal Samath



Hindu Kovil festival in Jaffna © mahinthan5-123RF.com ▲

THINGS TO NOTE

- China contributed 119,705 visitor arrivals between January and July 2015, growth of over 70 per cent, compared to 105,000 from the UK, which has traditionally taken the second spot among the top source markets. In 2006, less than 1,000 Chinese tourists visited Sri Lanka.
- The entry of brands like Mövenpick, Sheraton and Shangri-La is shaping Sri Lanka's international image.
- Aggressive brand and destination marketing being undertaken is shifting to attract high-end arrivals instead of just boosting numbers.
- A cluster of new malls like the Havelock City Mall, Colombo City Centre Mall and developments at Marino Sands Colombo are on par with the international lifestyle choices found in Singapore and Dubai.
- Military-controlled domestic airports like Ratmalana Airport, Batticaloa Airport, Pallaly Airport in Jaffna and China Bay Airport in Trincomalee are being upgraded to cater to more civilian traffic. Cinnamon Air is the only main domestic airline using amphibious aircraft to operate daily flight to many parts of Sri Lanka.

OVERVIEW

Two significant developments this year will be shaping tourism in Sri Lanka tourism in the next 12 to 24 months. The first is the installation of a new president and a new government following elections in January and August 2015, and the second is the phenomenal growth of the Chinese inbound market.

The new administration has begun to vigorously renew ties with the West after relations deteriorated under the previous regime in a dispute over alleged human rights violations in the past few years.

Markets like the UK and Germany – helped by friendlier diplomatic relations with Sri Lanka – should see a favourable rise in the next 12 to 18 months.

At the same time, the Chinese are unstoppable and accounted for 119,705 arrivals between January and July 2015, a rise of 77.6 per cent over the corresponding period in 2014. The figure is just slightly lower than the 126,734 arrivals achieved for the whole of 2014.

China has ousted the UK from its traditional second spot among top source markets this year. It was nowhere on the top five rankings just 10 years ago.

India, as in the past three to four years, continues to command the top spot with 170,134 arrivals in the first seven months of this year. India is expected to retain its place next year, but with China narrowing the gap. Increased growth from India is expected to come from the MICE segment owing to increased marketing efforts.

The new administration has also launched fresh campaigns in the West while expanding promotions in China and India, particularly with MICE promotions in Indian cities.

A more focused brand and destination promotion campaign is expected to be launched later this year.

Infrastructure is also growing with more hotels coming on stream next year including international brands like Shangri-La (2016/17), Sheraton (early-2016), Hyatt Regency (2016/17), Mövenpick (end-2015) and Marriott (end-2015). In terms of access, SriLankan Airlines is planning to increase frequencies between Colombo and Indian and Chinese cities.



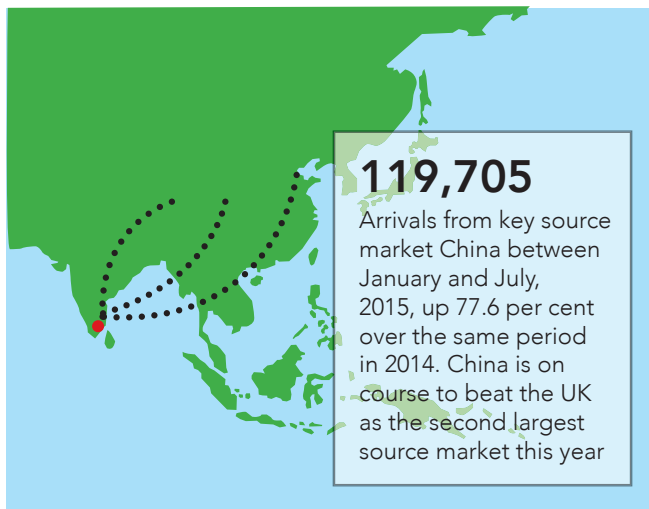
▲ Stick fishermen

SRI LANKA IN NUMBERS



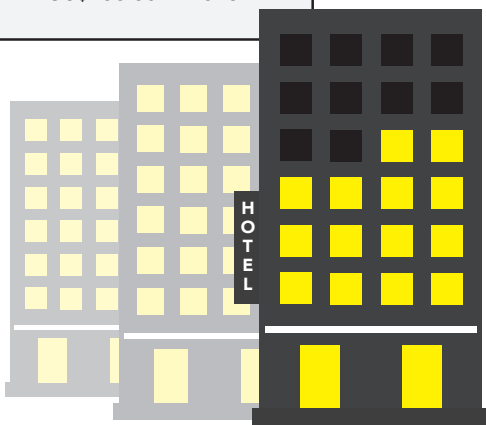
1,527,15

Visitor arrivals in 2014 compared to 1,274,593 in 2013, with 99 per cent arriving by air, according to Sri Lanka Tourism



160.80

In US dollars, the per diem in 2014 compared to US\$156.50 in 2013.

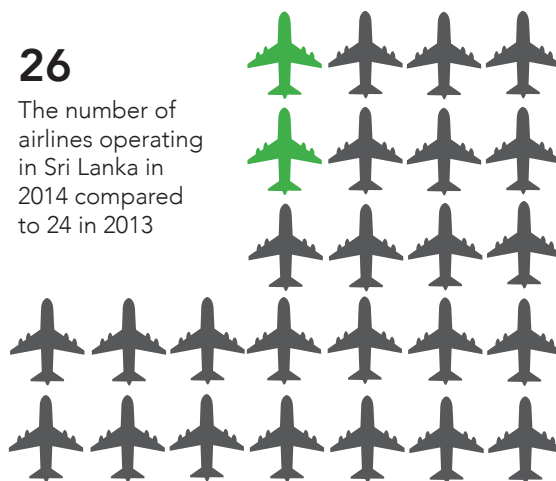


18,078

The total number of hotel rooms in 2014 versus 16,223 in 2013

26

The number of airlines operating in Sri Lanka in 2014 compared to 24 in 2013



IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“We are focusing on China, India and Japan with increased frequencies to these destinations. Approval for a three-year route rationalisation plan, which applies to both SriLankan Airlines and its budget carrier Mihin Lanka, will get under way soon where we are looking to pull out of unprofitable routes, mostly longhaul. Both airlines are also looking to increase frequencies to the Maldives and India.

Ajit Dias,
chairman, SriLankan Airlines

“The sperm whale will be the game changer as it is quickly becoming one of the key attractions in Sri Lanka. For example, you can see 200-plus sperm whales in pods of 20 to 30 swimming in one location off the eastern coast of Trincomalee. Elephants and leopards were once the attraction but the sperm whale, the blue whale and other varieties is drawing a lot of international attention including a BBC crew due here soon.

Chitral Jayatillake,
head of ecotourism, John Keells Hotels

“We have a new government that has led to improved relations with Europe, India and the Americas and thus no longer do we need to depend on just one or two countries like India and China for tourism. This confidence factor will lead to results in the next 12 to 18 months unless of course we have a natural calamity or there is a surge in airline fuel prices. I believe there will be more focused promotion and marketing of the destination, and arrivals from established markets like the UK and Germany will see increases, which will benefit a number of new hotels, including some from Jetwing coming up.



Hiran Cooray,
chairman, Jetwing Hotels Ltd

“With plans to launch a destination campaign in a few months' time through an internationally reputed agency, Sri Lanka's tourism will come to a watershed in 2016 as it will be promoted as a unique destination for high-end tourists. The focus in 2016 is to shift from numbers to a high-end clientele.

Today's travellers are different and they are well informed before they arrive at a destination. Our task is to deliver what they anticipate when booking Sri Lanka either as a holiday destination or venue for a MICE event.

Vipula Wanigasekera,
CEO/general manager, Sri Lanka Conventions Bureau

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. Watch the world's oldest fighting discipline

Angampora is the traditional martial art of Sri Lanka and it is said to be one of the oldest fighting disciplines in the world. Such performances are gaining popularity among tourists in Sri Lanka and are performed at hotels and resorts. Accompanied by incessant drumming and dance form, exponents use bare hand fighting techniques or swords and shields in the performance.

2. Not just ayurvedic treatments

Expert therapists in Colombo spas or those spread across hotels and resorts in Sri Lanka are trained in everything from Swedish Massage to Shiatsu apart from the traditional ayurvedic massage using herbal oils.

3. A snack that is also a musical treat

A plate of kothu rotti is a Sri Lankan snack found everywhere. It is made with sliced pieces of rotti blended and fried with a choice of chicken, beef, egg, onions, tomatoes and green chillies. The fun part is in making it as the cook chops up the bits of rotti on flat aluminium plates with the clatter and rhythm of the knives sounding like a traditional Sri Lankan song and dance routine at a cricket match.



▲ Angampora



Good Market (left), Pinnawela Open Air Zoo (centre), Bandaranaike International Airport ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what's new

Pinnawela Open Air Zoo, Pinnawela

Opened April 2015

Sri Lanka's first open air zoo at Pinnawela near the central town of Kegalle offers visitors a chance to see donkeys, pelicans, monkeys and ponies at close range.

Attractions include a leopard enclosure, mixed deer enclosure and a petting area with a baby wild boar, rabbits and a few varieties of birds. Further expansion is planned as the zoo now only occupies 10 hectares of the 17.2 hectare area. The zoo is close to the popular Pinnawela Elephant Orphanage and the Maximus paper plant which produces paper products from elephant dung.

Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort

Opening end-2015

The international brand luxury property is located at Tangalle on the southern coast and Cinnamon Air offers a daily 30-minute sea-plane flight from Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport to Dickwella, a 10 minute drive from the resort.

Set on a 8.4-hectare coconut plantation on the beachside, the 152 guest rooms and villas offer indigenous luxury featuring handwoven custom-made Sri Lankan furnishings, contemporary amenities and al fresco spaces to relax and enjoy stunning ocean views.

Bandaranaike International Airport Expansion

Opening mid-2020

Sri Lanka's aviation authorities are doubling capacity at the Bandaranaike International Airport from the current seven million to 15 million passengers by 2020.

The single-terminal airport will add a second terminal and more packing bays. The expansion will include more space for passengers in lounge, ticketing and customs areas, and more shopping and restaurant options.

Air India began daily flights between Colombo and New Delhi from June 2015. The airline currently operates daily flights to Chennai.

India is Sri Lanka's biggest source market.

Good Market, Colombo Racecourse

Opened July 2015

The Good Market at Colombo Racecourse is a good place to visit on a Saturday.

Every Saturday vendors are there selling a range of goods and products mostly food like fruits, vegetables, rice, spices, coconut, tea and organic farm products.

In addition, handicraft made from organic materials, health, beauty and home products along with live music and children's programmes making it a lively place to be.

Grand Gourmet at Nirj's

Opened August 2015

Grand Gourmet at Nirj's, is Sri Lanka's first fine dining French restaurant in the heart of Colombo and is designed in the style of the French romantic period of the 19th Century.

Grand Gourmet at Nirj's is complemented by Encore, a sophisticated bistro-style restaurant/bar serving breakfast, lunch and high tea. Encore aims to attract the leading lights of Sri Lankan industry, society and politics.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

SriLankan Airlines

Tel: (94) 7777 1979

Website: www.srilankan.lk

Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau

Tel: (94 11) 242 6900

Website: www.srilanka.travel

Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators

Tel: (94 11) 558 8800

Website: www.slaito.com

Tourist Hotel Association of Sri Lanka

(Affiliated to the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce)

Tel: (94 11) 242 1745

Website: www.chamber.lk

Travel Agents Association of Sri Lanka

Tel: (94 11) 558 8800

Website: www.travelagentsofsrilanka.com



SPOTLIGHT ON SRI LANKA

with

DIETHELM TRAVEL

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME



Marco Polo once referred to the island of Sri Lanka as the “finest of its size in all the world”. Today, that statement still holds true as the country’s unique authenticity, culture and diversity make it an intriguing destination offering travellers distinctly new experiences each and every day.

📣 PRODUCT NEWS

The rapid rise in tourists to Sri Lanka shows substantial evidence that this island paradise is well on its way to becoming a more chic and sophisticated destination. With many established international hotel brands, such as Anantara, Shangri-La and Sheraton, investing in hotel projects, tourism trends in the country are pointing toward an emphasis on luxury travel and accommodation that showcases the best of what Sri Lanka has to offer.

👉 GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

Going beyond the typical tour experience, Diethelm Distinctive offerings focus on facilitating real-world learning activities and experiences to provide guests with a deeper understanding of the local lifestyle, history and culture of the destination they visit. In Sri Lanka, Diethelm Distinctive guests can go on a nine-day journey across the island to visit some of the country’s most intriguing destinations, iconic landmarks, cultural attractions and adventure activities in one comprehensive package.

Be amazed by the simplicity of a fishing village during a stay in Negombo as you help the fishermen draw the nets to shore. Continue journeying to Habarana and wander through the unpaved village paths to observe the ways of farm life before heading to Digana where

you can work on the local farms yourself and learn how to prepare a traditional Sri Lankan meal. Next, the picturesque train ride from Peradeniya to Ella is a definite must on your way to Adams Peak to witness the amazing views of the famous Ella gap. Continue on to Kitulgala for a thrilling white water rafting session before finally arriving in the vibrant capital of Colombo and exploring the lesser-known sites of the city by tuk tuk.

👍 I RECOMMEND...

The dawn of the New Year is based on the sun’s astrological movement from the Meena Rashiya (House of Pisces) to the Mesha Rashiya (House of Aries), bringing an end to the harvest season. This celebration is a time of family togetherness. However, it also involves spiritual activities and customs determined by auspicious times.

A visit to AVANI Kalutara Resort during this holiday season is recommended to those who wish to witness the customs and traditions of these celebrations as they will be practised throughout the hotel premises, including playing the *rabana* and sharing festive delicacies such as *kiribath*, *kavum* (oil cakes) and *kokis*.



Harith Perera, Managing Director,
Diethelm Travel Sri Lanka

30 DON'T MISS



- **Sinhala and Tamil New Year**
April
A national holiday, the New Year celebrations also mark the end of the harvest.
- **Kandy Esala Perahera**
July-August
This festival involves an impressive procession paying homage to the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Lord Buddha and invoking blessings for protection against drought.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



Tamarind Gardens is a community-based project operating in Digana created to benefit the local community through helping develop farming, support initiatives and increase income from tourism. By spending a couple of days at the property – a charming homestay – guests are directly contributing to the village's well-being while also

receiving a once in a lifetime opportunity to experience rural village life in Sri Lanka.

With just four bungalows, designed to reflect typical village homes, the farm stay encourages visitors to become involved in the community work and help around the farm for a truly hands-on experience.

BEST BUYS



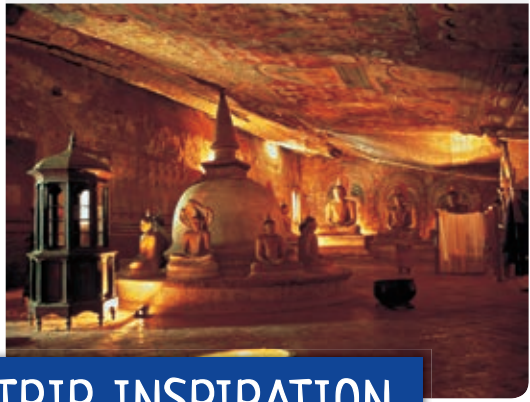
Sri Lanka is known for its traditional handicrafts as well as its high-end products. Some of the country's most sought-after goods include gems from Ratnapura, prêt-à-porter garments from Colombo, handicraft from Kandy, the famous Ceylon Tea from Nuwara Eliya, Ambalangoda's local masks and exotic spices from Matale.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



Kothu roti, referred to as 'Sri Lanka's hamburger', is a definite must-try dish while visiting the country. A simple but delicious comfort food, *kothu* is often served starting from lunchtime onward. However, a good cheese *kothu* can only be found after 19.00. Because of its availability in the evening, many places selling the local favourite stay open past

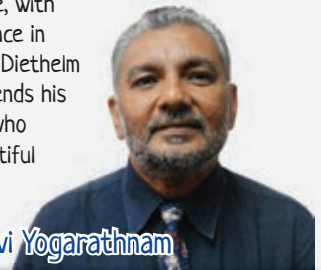
midnight, as *kothu* is a popular snack for those who choose to indulge in the island's nightlife.



TRIP INSPIRATION

Silhouettes of Paradise

A freelance national guide, with over 25 years of experience in the tourism industry and Diethelm Travel Sri Lanka, recommends his favourite journey for all who wish to explore this beautiful country.



Presented by Ravi Yogarathnam

DAY 1

Negombo – Sigiriya

Travel to **Sigiriya Rock Fortress**, a famous site that impresses its observers with the surprising grandeur of Sri Lanka's 5th century urban planning. Climb up this flat-topped monadnock to catch a scenic bird's-eye view of the emerald plains and leafy villages below.

DAY 2

Polonnaruwa – Minneriya

Cycle through the city of **Polonnaruwa** taking in the highlights and remarkable ruins of this ancient kingdom.

In the evening, enjoy a safari at the **Minneriya National Park** where lucky guests can witness the gathering of more than 500 elephants during the month of August.

DAY 3

Kandy

Continue on to **Kandy**, stopping en route to marvel at the fascinating **Dambulla Cave Temple**. Also enjoy a cultural dance performance and visit the Temple of the **Tooth Relic**, one of the country's holiest sites.

DAY 4

Colombo

End the adventure in **Colombo** exploring the country's vibrant commercial capital filled with significant historical and religious sites, as well as excellent shopping and street food scenes.

DIETHELM TRAVEL
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THAILAND

by Greg Lowe

THINGS TO NOTE

- Europe and the US still account for a large proportion of Thailand's biggest spending source markets. Dampened economic activity in those economies will affect tourism in Thailand.
- The Thai baht is currently at its weakest (at press time in November) against the US dollar in six years, and will increase spending power for tourists from economies pegged to the greenback.
- Thailand's military government has failed to resolve Thailand's long-standing political divisions and the delayed return to free elections and a democratically elected government could result in more protests. The August 17 Bangkok bombing raised concerns about international terror networks targeting tourists in Thailand.
- Chinese tourists account for almost 17 per cent of all arrivals. While this is a boon to the local trade, any downturn in trade from China will have dire consequences for the Thai economy.
- The Tourism Authority of Thailand launched its Muslim Friendly Destination campaign partly due to the country ranking number two on the Global Muslim Travel Index 2015. The NTO is allocating 10 to 15 per cent of the annual marketing budget to lure visitors from Islamic countries and communities around the world.

Khao Yai © benjaa-123RF.com ▲

OVERVIEW

Thailand was rocked by its worst peacetime bombing on August 17 when a pipe bomb was detonated at the Erawan Shrine in Bangkok, killing 20 and injuring more than 130, with tourists accounting for a significant number of casualties.

Independent analysts believe the attack was carried out in retaliation for Thailand's forced deportation of 109 Uighurs to China in July, although authorities have been keen to suggest a criminal network rather than a terrorist group was behind the blast. Either way, the blast dealt a significant blow to Thailand's tourism industry as it was on a strong path to recovery from protracted street protests and a coup d'état in 2014.

Arrivals from January to July were up 30 per cent compared to the same period a year earlier and the country welcomed its 20 millionth visitor less than two weeks after the attack.

The Ministry of Sports and Tourism is sticking with its target of 28.8 million arrivals and 2.2 trillion baht (\$61.82 billion) in revenue this year, despite in September estimating the bombing would cost the country 1.33 million international visitors and 64.3 billion baht. In fact, the Thailand Tourism Council the same week revised up its forecast from 28.8 million to 30 million. Travel consultants were less optimistic with many saying

it was too early to say how the attack would affect performance in the long run.

In other areas, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is, on paper at least, maintaining its position on targeting "quality tourists". The decline in Russian arrivals, which halved to 506,000 in the first seven months due to the collapse of the rouble, demonstrates the risk of relying on mass market tourism. However, the fact that Thailand welcomed 4.8 million Chinese during the same period, an increase of 112 per cent, challenges the credibility of TAT's claim to be focusing on higher-spending source markets while underpinning why authorities are doing anything they can to play down theories that suggest the August bombing directly targeted Chinese tourists.

In terms of infrastructure, there is positive news for the country's congested airports. U-Tapao Rayong-Pattaya International Airport became a fully functional commercial airport in June when it welcomed AirAsia's inaugural flight from Kuala Lumpur, which will run four times a week. The low-cost carrier (LCC) was due in October to launch new connections to China from U-Tapao, which is set to open a three million capacity passenger terminal by February 2016.

Don Mueang International Airport became the world's leading LCC airport according to Airports of Thailand when arrivals for budget carriers topped 22.5 million from January to September. An expanded Terminal 2 is due open by year-end, increasing capacity from 18.5 million to 30 million. Bangkok International Airport Suvarnabhumi remains congested. However, the expansion there to increase capacity from 40 million to 60 million is currently tabled for completion in 2019.



Phang Nga National Park © perszing1982-123RF.com ▲

THAILAND IN NUMBERS

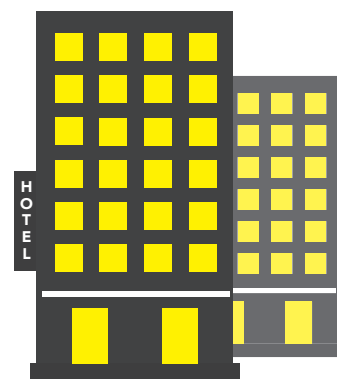


17.4

In millions, visitor arrivals in the first seven months of 2015, up 30.1 per cent from the same period in 2014. Arrivals from Russia saw a 50 per cent year-on-year decline between January and July 2015.

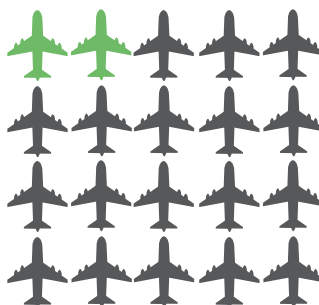
2,789

In baht (US\$78), the average revPAR in 1H2015 for Thailand, up 18.4 per cent compared to the same period in 2014, driven by a 21.9 per cent increase in occupancy to 74.4 per cent. The average daily rate (ADR) fell 2.8 per cent to 3,728 baht.



STR Global said Bangkok in 1H2015 recorded the highest increase in occupancy, up 38.7 per cent to 76 per cent, and the highest revPAR growth of 46.1 per cent to 2,491 baht.

Koh Samui had the highest ADR of 8,479 baht, compared with Chiang Mai, which had the lowest at 3,182 baht, STR Global added



13.7

In percentage, growth of international flights to 184,000 in 1H2015 according to Airports of Thailand. The number of international flights operated by low cost carriers increased 19.6 per cent to 47,605 in 1H2015

25.4

In percentage, the year-on-year increase of international passengers to 31.3 million in 1H2015.

Don Mueang airport saw international passenger numbers increase by 65.9 per cent to 4.2 million in 1H2015 compared to the 22.8 per cent rise to 22.4 million at Suvarnabhumi airport



IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“China is a very important market, especially here in the north of Thailand, but we always want to keep a contrast of cultures among our guests. We manage that by not making a deal with any specific agents that deal with the Chinese market or big groups there. We prefer FIT and families who book independently through OTAs.

Makoo Techasopon,
general manager, The Legend Chiang Rai

“I say we have to hit (our target of) 28.2 million arrivals (despite the August 17 Bangkok bombing) and we are focusing more on quality tourists instead of groups to do this. We have seen the problems with mass markets, such as Russia, which contracted severely when the rouble collapsed. We are working with agents in China to target higher-spending tourists there. We are seeing more Chinese FITs in Thailand, people who do not want to travel in groups.

Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul,
minister for sports and tourism

“The Chaophraya River is real Bangkok, connecting past and present, history and culture, commerce and entertainment, local communities and travellers. That is appealing in itself as an attraction. Added to that is a programme of events that we plan to build in scale each year and you have a magic formula.

The key drivers for brand Bangkok will be food, music, creativity – art, design, fashion – and spectacles such as Brilliant Bangkok Festival of Light and Ideas being planned for end-2016. There is nothing wrong with starting modestly so long as you manage the expectations of the traveller. Collaboration, however, is crucial.



David Robinson,
director, Bangkok River Partners

“One of the positive things we can look forward to is the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which will stimulate tourism and investment. This is an opportunity to offer new routes following the establishment of the ASEAN Open Sky. This will play a positive role for more intra-ASEAN travel while improving domestic and regional connectivity. An additional benefit of AEC is also the standardisation of services for the travel industry and we look forward to attracting more travellers as a result of this. However, the changing price of fuel is a basic factor that airlines and the travel industry must constantly be prepared to adapt to.

Tassapon Bijleveld,
CEO, Thai AirAsia

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. City with a naming record

Bangkok holds the Guinness World Record for having the longest place name on the planet.

Its full name is Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yuthaya Mahadilokplace Namepharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Piman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit.

Fortunately Thais simply shorten this to Khrueng Thep, although Bangkok will also do.

2. Easy access on foot

Mae Sai in Chiang Rai province is the northern-most tip of Thailand. Located near the Golden Triangle, the town borders Myanmar and provides a good opportunity to cross over into Tachilek – just a short stroll across the bridge – to browse around the market and visit the local pagodas.

3. Krabi vs Phuket

While Krabi does not have the air access enjoyed by Phuket, a couple of hours drive to the north, the Andaman resort area benefits from strict environmental regulations which means hotels are built low-rise and beaches are free from hawkers, making it one of the country's more relaxing and unspoiled seaside destinations.



▲ A Bangkok SkyTrain



Walking with Giants (left), Outrigger Koh Samui Beach Resort (centre), Rattanakosin Story Walking Tour ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what's new

The Rattanakosin Story Walking Tour

Launched September 2015

What we today know as Bangkok moved across the river from Thonburi to Rattanakosin Island in 1782.

This walking tour covers an area rich in culture and history. Key sites visited include the Amulet Market, Sanam Luang, City Pillar Shrine, Ministry of Defence, Grand Palace, Wat Ratchpradit, Pig Memorial, Suan Saranrom and Wat Pho. Expert guides provide colour and insight into each area and the communities which inhabit them.

Walking with Giants

Launched August 2015

This new experience, suitable for families, allows tourists to enter the fascinating world of pachyderms in an ethical and sustainable way.

Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort is well known for its on-site Elephant Camp, which supports a number of socially responsible elephant projects and the families of the mahouts who work there.

During the two-hour walk through the local jungle, elephant experts talk about the animals' daily life, their biology and the problems they face in Thailand. Guests can prepare snacks and help give the elephants a shower at the end of the tour.

Mango Tree On The River

Opened February 2015

This contemporary Thai restaurant in Bangkok is a hallmark feature of the recently opened Yodpiman River Walk, a riverside development which backs onto the famous 24-hour Pak Klong Talad flower market.

Mango Tree On The River, on the northern point of the development, affords stunning views of Wat Arun and a number of other historic buildings on the West Bank of the Chao Phraya River.

The restaurant is on three floors, has inside and al fresco seating and is ideal for sundowners, small parties and complete buyouts. The speedboat shuttle to and from Saphan Taksin pier is well worth the experience.

Private Pool Villas at Civilai Khao Yai

Opened December 2014

This resort features 11 pool villas and adds additional choice at the hideaway luxury end of Khao Yai's accommodation offering. The one or two bedroom villas – which starts at 214m² – come with butler service, a jacuzzi, rain shower, an outdoor wooden Japanese bath tub, sauna, garden and a swimming pool with adjustable temperature.

The Pavilion, the resort's only restaurant, serves a range of Thai and international cuisine, including fruit and vegetables grown on the property's organic garden.

Outrigger Koh Samui Beach Resort

Opened June 2015

The Hawaiian resort brand's foray into Koh Samui is a beachfront property with 52 rooms, comprising 34 pool suites and 18 pool villas. Located on Hanuman Bay on the southern tip of the island, guests can enjoy 300m of beach at the front of the property, which features the Navasana Spa and five bars and restaurants. As with all Outrigger properties, there is a wide range of water sports equipment to choose from and the resort is very family friendly.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Thai Airways

Tel: (66 2) 356 1111

Website: www.thaiairways.com

Ministry of Tourism and Sports

Tel: (66 2) 283 1500

Website: www.mots.or.th

Tourism Authority of Thailand

Tel: (66 2) 250 5500

Website: www.tourismthailand.org

Thai Hotels Association

Tel: (66 2) 281 3902

Website: thaihotels.org

Association of Thai Travel Agents

Tel: (66 2) 237 6046

Website: www.atta.or.th

Thai Travel Agents Association

Tel: (66 2) 214 6175

Website: www.ttta.or.th



SPOTLIGHT ON THAILAND



with

DIETHELM TRAVEL

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME

Recognised around the world as a leading holiday destination, there is much more to Thailand than what initially meets the eye. A deep current of culture, spirituality, beauty and generosity runs through this country that continues to offer visitors unique and authentic experiences to last a lifetime.

PRODUCT NEWS

While Khao Sok is known for tented accommodation, Diethelm Travel Thailand's exclusive stays at Our Jungle House, a luxurious tree house resort deep in the rainforest, offers truly exceptional experiences.

The relatively unknown Koh Yao Yai, an island near Phuket in the Andaman Sea, boasts pristine beaches, turquoise waters and world-class resorts including Paradise Koh Yao, a boutique beachfront hotel, the eco-luxury Santhiya Koh Yao Yai resort and stunning Six Senses Yao Noi.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

Joining a Diethelm Distinctive tour ensures guests receive a journey of a lifetime that far surpasses standard excursions. In Thailand, the Diethelm Distinctive offerings highlight little-known destinations or strive to showcase the more popular hotspots from a different perspective.

In the northern town of Chiang Dao, the Hill Tribe Shaman Tour, guides guests through a spiritual journey exploring the ancient healing arts of the village shamans who demonstrate their use of herbs and rituals used to tune in with the energy of the universe.

The four-day Central Highlights Tour, for example, leads guests through some of the most significant and stunning places in Central Thailand including the ancient Kingdom

of Ayutthaya, rural Kanchanaburi and colourful floating markets. Another off-the-beaten-path experience is the Two Days in Kaeng Krachan Tour that covers one of Thailand's most diverse national parks filled with flora and fauna.

In Phuket, travellers can sneak away from the crowds slowly exploring Phang Nga Bay on the three-day Canoe Mini Expedition kayaking to various islands, relishing in the region's wild nature and interacting with local guides.

I RECOMMEND...

Head to Rayong Province just a 90-minute drive from Bangkok, through hilly fruit plantations and past elephant crossing signs, to discover a region often overlooked by foreign tourists.

Here visitors find pristine white beaches, including Laem Mae Phim, which are slowly being opened up to an international audience thanks to hotels like Novotel, Marriott and soon the Centara Sappaya Design Resort. Visit one of the nearby turtle sanctuary islands or simply take a walk through the mangrove forests.

Personally, I enjoy observing the local Thai families enjoying the beach and barbecuing fresh seafood from nearby wet markets, like Ban Phe.



Hans van den Born,
Managing Director,
Diethelm Travel Thailand

30 DON'T MISS



- **Songkran**
April
The Thai New Year known for its water-soaked festival fun.
- **Candle Festival in Ubon Ratchathani**
Usually July
Marking the beginning of Buddhist Lent.
- **Pi Tha Khon**
March-July
A unique group of festivals dedicated to ghosts celebrated in North-east Thailand.
- **Loi Krathong**
Usually November
A festival when handmade decorative floats made of flowers and leaves are launched into rivers.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



Diethelm Travel Thailand's commitment to responsible travel has led to collaborating with active social enterprises that provide authentic, community-based experiences. The company believes that its travel offerings can help preserve local destinations, culture, communities and even animals.

In Thailand, elephant attractions are an important aspect of the tourism industry but not always run in the most sustainable manner. However during Diethelm Travel Thailand excursions to ElephantsWorld, a sanctuary and rehabilitation centre in Kanchanaburi, guests will not find any elephant trekking but instead have the opportunity to help take care of the gentle elephants with plenty of memorable one-on-one interaction.

BEST BUYS



Aside from traditional handicrafts, Thailand produces a number of goods to take home such as oils, spices that invoke that compelling flavours of Thai cuisine, textiles and raw silk. The impressive Eathai food court at Central Embassy shopping centre even offers packaged food specialities to take home with you.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



One of the most typical Thai restaurants in Bangkok is Baan Khun Mae near Siam Square. Surrounded by high-rise buildings and luxury shopping malls, the restaurant is housed in a typical Thai-style house serving popular Thai dishes, such as *som tam* (green papaya salad) and *phad grapaow* (minced chicken or pork meat fried with Thai

basil) that appeal to both locals and foreigners. While in Chiang Mai, don't miss trying the famous *khao soi*!



TRIP INSPIRATION

Siam Central Highlights Revealed

A Diethelm Product Manager who has lived in Thailand since 2005, highlights some of Bangkok's must-see surroundings.



Presented by Simone Persano

DAY 1

Bangkok — Ayutthaya

Head to **Kok Kred**, an island in the centre of the **Chao Phraya River** famous for its handcrafted pottery, for a bike tour through the small streets of this charming village and a local lunch overlooking the river.

Ayutthaya

Step back in time and explore **Ayutthaya**, the second Siamese capital and a UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Tour the town with stops at **Bang Pa-In Palace**, **Wat Mahatat** and more. In the evening, revel in the romantic atmosphere of the old capital with dinner at a riverside restaurant.

Stay at **Baan Thai House**, a boutique property blending a traditional Thai wooden house with a more contemporary style, or the luxurious **Sala Ayutthaya**, known for its intimate ambiance.

DAY 2

DAY 3

Ayutthaya — Mekhala Cruise

Boarding an overnight **Mekhala Cruise**, enjoy observing life along the Chao Phraya River, the River of Kings, from the comfort of the teak wood vessel.

Mekhala Cruise — Bangkok

Rise early to visit a morning market then continue down the river to Bangkok spotting iconic sights such as the **Grand Palace** and **Wat Arun**.

DAY 4

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VIETNAM

by Li Xu



Po Nagar Cha Towers © ptommyandone-123RF.com ▲

THINGS TO NOTE

- Visa-free stays of up to 15 days were extended to visitors from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK and Belarus in July 2015. The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) is also planning an e-marketing campaign targeted at Western Europe.
- VNAT is also targeting India and Russia as high-potential markets and is organising fam trips and attending local trade shows.
- Charter flights between Russia and Ho Chi Minh City will resume in October 2015 by Pegasus Touristik after a nine-month suspension. Pegasus Touristik brought 196,000 Russian tourists to Vietnam in 2014, counting for over 50 per cent of the total Russian visitor arrivals.
- The exchange rate fluctuation of the Vietnamese dong, mostly depreciation and causing price increases, is weakening the price competitiveness of tour operators in Vietnam.

OVERVIEW

Targeting longhaul source countries in Europe and North America with visa relaxation policies while facing a budget constraint to increase marketing efforts, Vietnam is more likely to see gradual improvement in inbound tourism in 2016.

After falling for 13 months in a row to June, international visitor arrivals in Vietnam finally welcomed positive monthly growth in July with a year-on-year increase of 7.1 per cent.

A total of 4.4 million foreigners visited Vietnam in the first seven months of 2015, a drop of 9.4 per cent compared to the same period last year.

Up 10 per cent in July, China's recovery signals the rebound beyond itself, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Mainland Chinese tourists accounted for nearly 25 per cent of the total arrivals in 2014, and improvements in other source markets just cannot compensate the fall in China traffic.

The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) has been targeting South Korea and Japan since late-2014 and has identified India and Russia as

key markets with the potential to grow from now on.

Visa-free entry for six European countries until 2019 have been warmly welcomed by the industry.

However, the real impact is unlikely to be evident until the middle of next year, according to Kenneth Atkinson, chairman of the Tourism Working Group under the Vietnam Business Forum, who noted Europeans are known to plan early for their vacations.

With its limited budget, VNAT is trying to maximise its marketing effectiveness along with the new visa policies via an e-marketing campaign under way for North European markets.



Lotus flowers on the Mekong Delta © xuanhuongho-123RF.com ▲

VIETNAM IN NUMBERS



4.4

In millions, the total number of international visitors in the first seven months of 2015, down 9.4 per cent year-on-year

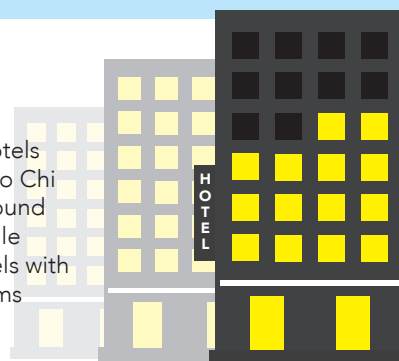
50

In percentage, the increase in arrivals from the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain expected for the next three years, up from the 2015 level



106

The number of hotels as of 2Q2015 in Ho Chi Minh City with around 13,800 rooms, while Hanoi has 63 hotels with around 8,855 rooms



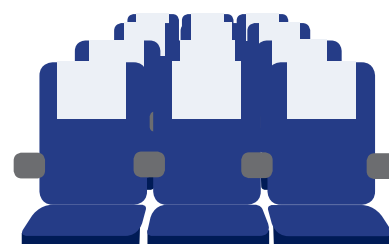
16

In billion US dollars, the figure budgeted for a new airport near Ho Chi Minh City, expected to accommodate 100 million passengers per year by 2050



10

In millions, the number of air seats available between October 2015 and July 2016, up 3.9 per cent year-on-year. Nearly 90 per cent of the capacity is within Asia



IN MY OPINION

Industry leaders share their views about the destination



“Three-quarter of Vietnam is natural beauty. Adventure tours are becoming increasingly popular since the 2011 cave movie *Sanctum*, followed by the opening of Son Doong Cave. We are very positive about our business growth in 2016, and hope good international publicity as well as the visa exemption policy will result in more European guests.

Chau A Nguyen,
CEO, Oxalis Adventure Tours

“Some efforts from VNAT are easing the year-long decrease in arrivals but I do hope to see more action in making policies to protect the valuable tourism assets of Vietnam, and the launch of education programmes to improve human resources beyond investing in infrastructure upgrades. Airlines need to offer more competitive prices to bring in more tourists.



Edouard George,
president, Phoenix Voyages Group Ltd.

“VNAT has moved in the right direction with visa exemptions for six European countries and we hope to see another giant step with Australian, American, and Canadian visitors, to put Vietnam on the same competitive level as Thailand. Marketing in trade shows or online is another big effort to be made so that the visual presence of Vietnam will be as attractive as the country is itself. Recently the local trade has launched a couple of online initiatives: Quintessential Collection Vietnam (www.quintessentialcollectionvietnam.com) and Central Coast Vietnam (www.centralcoastvietnam.com).

Anthony Gill,
general manager, The Nam Hai in Hoi An



“We expect a positive 2016 with Japan, South Korea and China dominating our guest mix. As Japanese and Korean companies are moving their businesses to Vietnam, it is a great time and opportunity to increase corporate business and MICE group bookings. Vietnam’s hotel competition is getting fierce, three five-star hotels have opened in Ho Chi Minh City while Hanoi is seeing five more hotels opening soon.

Edmar Manglo,
revenue/e-commerce manager, Hotel Nikko Saigon

DID YOU KNOW?

Fun facts

1. The mother of all celebrations

Tet Nguyen Dan is the most important celebration in Vietnamese culture. Translated to mean the festival of the first day, Tet Nguyen Dan celebrates a mix of Western and Eastern holidays – Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s Day, Halloween and birthdays. Tet rites begin a week before New Year’s Day while the most boisterous celebration happens on the New Year’s Eve.

2. Join the tribe in scooter nation

It is said that approximately 10 million motorbikes travel on the roads of Vietnam every day. Hiring a motorbike to join the endless scooter rallies in the cities or to follow the winding roads in the countryside is a brilliant way to experience Vietnamese daily life. However, do watch out because traffic can be quite chaotic.

3. The origins of speed dating

Speed dating might have come to the West recently, but it has been part of hill tribe life in Vietnam for years and years as hill tribes have been meeting at “love markets”, where the local young single people come together with the intent of finding a mate. The annual “love market” in the city of Ha Giang, usually in May, draws many hill tribes from all over the region.



▲ Enjoying street food in Hanoi © mazzzur-123RF.com



Son Doong Cave Expedition Tour (left), The Reverie Saigon ▲

PRODUCT GALLERY

A round-up of what's new

SpiceRoads' Ho Chi Minh Trail Bike Tour

Available January, March, April, September, November, and December 2016

This 11-day 922-km guided bike tour follows the Ho Chi Minh trail, a former supply route used by the Vietnamese during the second Indochina war in the late-1960s.

Starting from Hanoi and ending in Hue, the tour offers real Vietnamese experiences in rural and touristic regions along with exciting cycling challenges.

Oxalis Adventure Tours' Son Doong Cave Expedition Tour

Available February to August 2016

Five hundred explorers will be able to dive into the world's largest cave – Son Doong Cave – in Quang Binh Province.

The adventure lasts five days and four nights with a maximum of 10 guests per departure. Health and fitness rules are strict as the programme is challenging.

The regular expedition cost US\$3,000 per person, while two special photography tours, available in February and April, cost US\$4,000 per person. The 2015 tours were sold out by mid-2014.

Mercure Phu Quoc Resort & Villas

Opened August 2015

Located on Truong Beach, five minutes away by car from Phu Quoc International Airport, this newly refurbished resort is the second hotel on the island of Phu Quoc opened by Accor Hotels, and the third Mercure in Vietnam.

Designed in contemporary Vietnamese style, there are 72 villas with private terraces and the luxurious beachfront Executive Pool Villas are built with private swimming pools with underwater lounge chairs and bathrooms with Jacuzzi tubs.

Quintessential Collection Local Luxury Tips Digital Platform

Available at www.quintessentialcollectionvietnam.com

Five renowned properties in Vietnam namely the Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi, The Nam Hai in Hoi An, The Reverie Saigon in Ho Chi Minh City, La Residence Hotel & Spa in Hue and Paradise Cruises on Halong Bay, have founded the Quintessential Collection digital platform.

Regular updates from the general managers of these properties help guests to find local luxury lifestyle options and best offers in town.

Vietnam Helicopter Corporation Private Helicopter Tours

Launched July 2015

Vietnam Helicopter Corporation is looking forward to serving tourists in Northern and Central Vietnam with its EC130T2 aircraft, accommodating up to six passengers per flight.

Planned routes include Hanoi to Halong Bay (1.5 hours) or Hanoi to Sapa (3.5 hours), during which passengers can enjoy the spectacular landscape of Vietnam.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

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Website: www.vietnamairlines.com

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism

Tel: (84 4) 3942 3760

Website: www.vietnamtourism.gov.vn /
www.vietnamtourism.com

Vietnam Tourism Association

Tel: (84 4) 3942 7620

Website: www.vita.vn

Vietnam Hotel Association

Tel: (84 4) 3829 3933

Website: www.vietnamhotel.org.vn



SPOTLIGHT ON VIETNAM

with

DIETHELM TRAVEL

JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME



Dazzling green rice fields, hot steamy pho, squealing motorbikes and the welcome laziness that comes from a relaxing day at the beach: this is Vietnam, a country that completely captivates the senses. From its sprawling urban cities to remote rural villages, it has it all and welcomes visitors with open arms.

PRODUCT NEWS

Exclusive resorts in Vietnam are taking guests' experiences to the next level. The Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, for example, is opening its most impressive villa yet, while Victoria Sapa Resort & Spa is launching a Victoria coach between Hanoi and Sapa and unique Victoria Homestay for Victoria clients. Diethelm Travel Vietnam is also offering a new 17-day overland tour combining the best of Sapa and northern Vietnam with destinations in Yunnan (China) and Myanmar.

GO LOCAL WITH DIETHELM DISTINCTIVE

Covering tens of thousands of kilometres in southern Vietnam, the Mekong Delta is the heart of the country. The Diethelm Distinctive three-day soft adventure in the wonderfully watery world of the Mekong Delta allows adventurous travellers the exceptional chance to explore the country's rural landscape and hypnotising delta waterways. During the journey, guests enjoy witnessing the roaring trade at Cai Rang floating market, the biggest of its kind in the delta, gaining insight into the life of local farmers and more as they venture deep into the labyrinth of waterways and lush islands.

While the tour is mostly by boat, the most popular means of transportation in the region, countryside

biking and kayaking excursions around Can Tho spice up the itinerary with the opportunity to explore the beauty of Vietnam at your own pace.

One of the highlights of Diethelm Distinctive offerings is interacting with the local people including a visit to the village of a Khmer ethnic minority group and do not miss gazing at their incredible pagoda – a real hidden treasure with beautiful sculpture work – and learning more about a unique way of farming where local farmers tend to their suspended vegetable gardens along the river banks.

I RECOMMEND...

Escape the crowded interior of a tour bus and experience Ho Chi Minh City in true Vietnamese style – on the back of a Vespa scooter. Zoom around the intoxicating city on an early ride, join the locals practising tai chi, visit Ben Thanh Market to witness the busy morning hours as sellers set up their stands and start the day's business and enjoy a bowl of the famous pho noodle soup, a breakfast staple, with a traditional Vietnamese coffee or tea. Watch the city wake up and come to life before continuing your ride to admire architectural and historical landmarks around town.



Torsten Eden,
Managing Director,
Diethelm Travel Vietnam

30 DON'T MISS



- **Water Puppet Festival**
February
A famous puppetry festival at Thay Pagoda, the west of Hanoi.
- **Mid-Autumn Festival**
September 15, 2016
A harvest festival celebrated with dragon dances, lanterns and moon cakes.
- **Oc Bom Boc Festival**
December
An exciting boat racing festival in Soc Trang.
- **Dalat Flower Festival**
December
Dalat's annual extravaganza showcasing locally grown blossoms.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



Diethelm Travel Vietnam's three-day Green Halong Bay Cruise with Paradise, departing daily from Hanoi, are designed to address the environmental issues facing Halong Bay, one of the country's greatest tourist attractions and natural beauties. Teaming up with Paradise Cruises and Green Halong, a local NGO that provides a range of

continuous programmes to maintain the environmental integrity of Halong Bay, the cruise offers eco-conscious travellers a phenomenal travel deal and rewarding experience while still caring for the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Explore the ethereal bay, enjoy gorgeously designed cabins and, most importantly, help maintain this natural world wonder.

BEST BUYS



Handmade products from ethnic minority groups are best bought in Hanoi. Browse intricate woodwork, goods made from carved buffalo horns, bags and scarves at Craft Link or Mekong Quilts, then head to O2 NGO for a collection of fair trade products or Indigenous for home furnishings and delicious fair trade coffee.

FOODIE'S DELIGHT



An iconic symbol of Ho Chi Minh City, Ben Thanh Market is highly popular with tourists seeking local handicraft, textiles and souvenirs, as well as local cuisine. Cooks at the market whip up authentic Vietnamese dishes made to order around the clock, while in the evening, visitors can sit outside at a

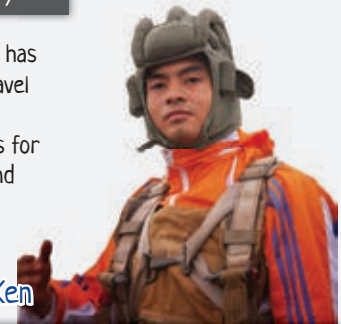
number of temporary sidewalk restaurants serving local favourites such as flavourful *pho* (Vietnamese noodle soup) and *banh canh cua* (crab noodle soup).



TRIP INSPIRATION

Mai Chau Adventure in Style

Our Data Manager, who has worked for Diethelm Travel Vietnam for four years, shares some insider tips for discovering Mai Chau and Moc Chau



Presented by **Ken**

DAY 1

Start with a visit to **Mai Chau**, an idyllic valley recognised by its lush rice fields and ethnic minority groups.

Spend the day kayaking on **Hoa Binh Reservoir**.

DAY 2

DAY 3

Enjoy the great outdoors by hiking and rock climbing in the charming **Chieng Chau village**.

Head to the **Moc Chau Plateau**, one of the country's most attractive destinations, to experience a farm stay unlike any other – here you'll be pampered with indulgent local delicacies and special spa treatments.

DAY 4

DAY 5

Join local farmers in **picking tea buds** and **making green tea** before returning to Hanoi.

If taking a motorcycle, make sure to stop frequently and take in the incredible scenery. The best thing about the region is simply driving its wondrous roads and admiring the amazing landscape.

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