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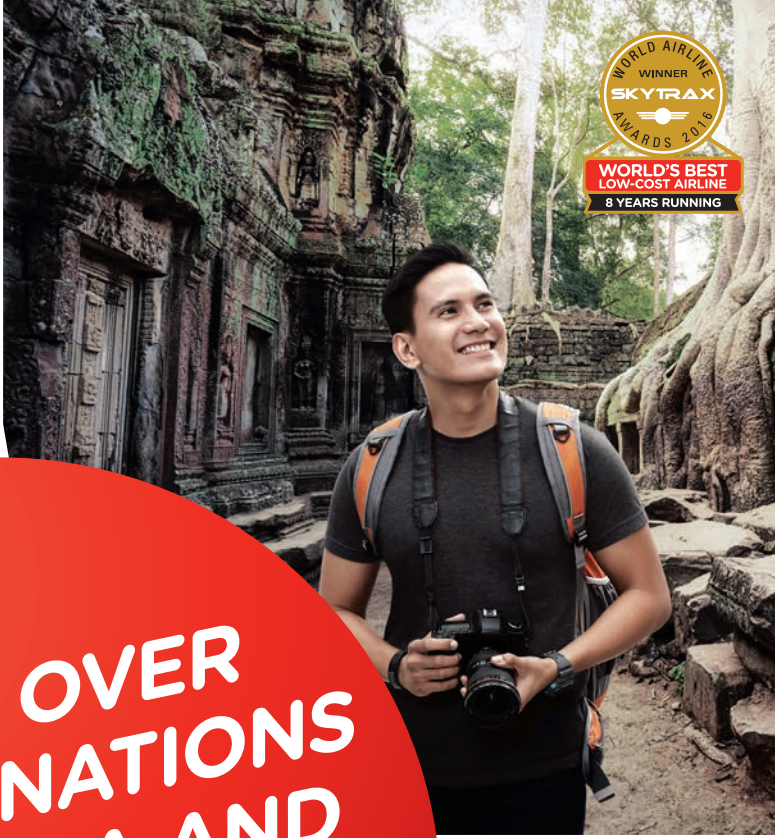
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FOREWORD



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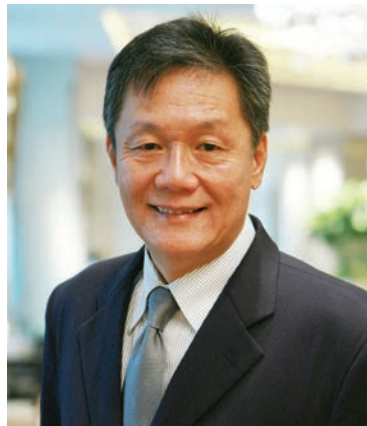
It is our pleasure to partner TGT Asia in presenting Asian Tourism Expert Guide 2017 and a very warm welcome to this ninth edition. Asia has been in the forefront of global tourism growth and every travel professional in this region can take much pride as a contributing player in this vibrant industry. The future for travel is certain to grow further in Asia Pacific and we must embrace the opportunities ahead. Today's well connected world on the other hand presents challenges as consumers have more choices, decisions are more impromptu and travel needs more varied even within the same trip.

In this edition, we are very pleased to highlight how as the region's leading online B2B supplier; TAcenre.com (订房网 TAcenre.cn in China), can support your travel business 24 X 7. In each destination feature, we offer a snapshot of some of our preferred partners and showcase the variety of products available in the system. All products can be booked on instant confirmation and the platform features destination coverage of over 90 countries worldwide or over 8 million (s.k.u.) products worldwide. TAcenre is indeed the most comprehensive B2B platform.

In 2017, we celebrate our first 5 years' milestone and we thank all our suppliers, partners and clients like yourselves for your invaluable support and patronage. This is also the year we will be launching several new business initiatives which we aim to empower your business to greater heights.

Warm regards,

Fred Seow
CEO
TAcenre.com



CHOOSING ASIA HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER

Dear Travel Trade Partners,

As another eventful year for our region's travel industry comes to a close, we are excited to look ahead into 2017 with this ninth edition of the Asian Tourism Expert Guide (ATEG).

Produced for the first-time in collaboration with TAcenre.com, this annual guide makes planning an itinerary to one or more of the 17 featured key Asian destinations, including newly added Japan, South Korea and Australia, even more seamless and accessible. Here's why.

The indispensable analysis of each destination by TGT's award winning editorial team, spans succinct tourism performance presented in easy-to-digest infographics, insightful perspectives of inbound players on 2017's business outlook, essential hot new products, top travel themes and much more. Accessing the latest developments in the region and what will be trending in the coming months is easier than ever.

In addition, readers can now bring dream itineraries to life with recommended destination specific products, solutions and ready providers made possible by our partner TAcenre.com and their global B2B network.

I hope you will continue to find this publication a vital resource in your course of doing business in Asia and we welcome your feedback on what you liked best and how we can improve to make next year's edition even better. Email your comments to ttgnewsdeskttgasia.com and put ATEG 2016/2017 in the subject line. We look forward to hearing from you.

Warmest Regards,

Darren Ng
Managing Director
TGT Asia Media



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One of the many views that have come to represent Australia – the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Sydney Opera House

AUSTRALIA

By Rebecca Elliott

Australia delivered a strong performance during the 2015/2016 financial year, with international visitor numbers up by 10 per cent on the previous year to 7.8 million. China was the strongest market, with visitors up by 22 per cent, followed closely by South Korea, up by 20 per cent, and the US, Japan and Singapore up by 14 per cent a piece. India rose nine per cent on the previous year.

International visitor spend also saw impressive growth, up 14 per cent to reach A\$38.1 billion (US\$28.5 billion), adding almost A\$5 billion (US\$3.7 billion) to the Australian economy over the 12-month period.

Tourism Australia recently announced in the latest edition of Tourism Forecasts 2016 that total annual overnight spend was expected to reach A\$127 billion by the year 2020 – well ahead of the original A\$115 billion target.

Tourism Australia's managing director John O'Sullivan said: "The latest figures show that international spending is currently growing at more than twice the rate of visitor arrivals, accelerated by the growth in visitation from key markets in Asia."

Financial year 2015/2016 figures confirmed that notion with spend growing faster (up 14 per cent) than visitor arrivals (up 10 per cent).

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5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ✦ Air access between Asia and Australia is improving to cater for rising demand. Recent examples include the commencement of Singapore Airlines flights between Singapore, Wellington in New Zealand and Australia's capital, Canberra, in September and Qantas daily direct flights between Tokyo and Melbourne commencing this December.
- ✦ Recent changes to visas for visitors from China, India and Indonesia will ease travel to Australia. For example, nationals from India can now apply for a three-year, multiple entry visa and take advantage of a user-pays fast-track service.
- ✦ Music to Tourism Australia's ears following the successful Restaurant Australia campaign was the announcement that Melbourne will be the host city for the World's 50 Best Restaurant Awards in April 2017. Melbourne will join London and New York as the only cities to have hosted the prestigious event.
- ✦ Australia is currently experiencing an infrastructure renaissance with new hotels and venues opening across the nation at a rapid pace. Hot off the press is Melbourne's first QT hotel, while Sofitel Sydney Darling Harbour will open in the New Year.
- ✦ An ongoing massive city redevelopment in Adelaide has thrown the once sleepy city into the spotlight. The star project is the Adelaide BioMed City, the largest biomed precinct in the Southern Hemisphere. Although only one facility – the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute – has opened, increased healthcare commerce and research activities as well as destination publicity have led to Adelaide hosting 45 health science conventions in 2015 and 2016.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

Six

/ The number of consecutive years Melbourne has been voted The World's Most Liveable City.



25

/ The percentage increase in international visitor spend on food and wine to more than A\$1 billion (US\$7.6 million) since the launch of Restaurant Australia in December 2013.



716,000

/ The number of international visitors to Australia in July 2016, an increase of 14.1 per cent from the same time last year.



13.4



/ The number in millions of Chinese consumers reached during the 10-week rollout of Tourism Australia's latest aquatic and coastal campaign.



3.9

/ The number in millions of international holiday-makers to Australia in the year ending July 2016.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“Continued growth from our Asian key markets is expected to drive further increases in (arrivals). China is expected to continue its rise to eclipse New Zealand as our largest source of international visitors by 2017/2018, while newer markets such as India and Indonesia are expected to steadily rise alongside our long standing markets of Japan, Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea.”

John O'Sullivan, managing director, Tourism Australia

“2016 has been an exceptional year for Adelaide, South Australia. 2017 is already tracking well with a large amount of pipeline business. Based on average conversion rates, 2017 looks set to equal or better this current year.”

Damien Kitto, chief executive officer, Adelaide Convention Bureau



“The year ahead looks set to be one of the best years ever for AAT Kings. Domestic tourism remains strong, but the real opportunity will come from the booming international market. Both Eastern and Western hemisphere markets look strong and our forward bookings are most encouraging. Hot spots will be the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Tasmania, with food, wine and adventure being the key experiences.”

Anthony Hayes, global managing director, AAT Kings



From left: Floriade Australia ; Alice Springs Camel Cup



FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Jun 8-21, 2017
DARK MOFO

Hobart's annual midwinter festival of culture features offbeat theatre productions, retrospectives of classic films, light shows and late openings of the lauded local museum, MONA.

Jul 8, 2017
ALICE SPRINGS CAMEL CUP

An iconic race whose reputation reaches far beyond the Northern Territory, Alice Springs Camel Cup offers plenty of fun for all ages and raises funds for local charities.

Sep 16 - Oct 15, 2017
FLORIADE

Australia's biggest spring celebration is held in Canberra, with a floral display across 8,000m² of inner city parkland. Many fun activities are offered too, such as yoga in the park and garden parties.

WHAT'S NEW

EXPLORE PERTH AND THE SWAN RIVER

Explore Tours Perth has created the ultimate day-out in Western Australia's capital city with the launch of its new tour, Explore Perth and the Swan River. The 10-hour tour departs from multiple city locations and is a collaboration of some of the city's newest tour operators, which takes in Kings Park, a ferry ride on the Swan River, a Segway tour and lunch on the riverbank, visits to Mosman and Freshwater Bays and a final stop at Cottosloe Beach for sunset drinks. Prices from A\$159 per person.

CAMELS AND CANAPÉS

Camel milk is said to have 10 times more iron and triple the amount of Vitamin C than cow's milk. Visitors to the Sunshine Coast can learn this and more on Live It Tours' new tour, Camels and Canapés. The three-hour experience transports guests to the QCamel Farm, the first dairy in Australia credited with producing pasteurised camel milk. Set against the backdrop of the Glasshouse Mountains, guests can sip champagne and try camel's milk panna cotta with fresh pomegranate or camel's milk tzatziki and zaatar bread. Prices from A\$110 per person.

KOMBI SURF TOURS

Wannabe surfers can now learn all about the craft in style by cruising the Coast in a fully restored 1969 Kombi bus, thanks to a new tour offered by Coast Capers. With seating for seven people, the half-day tour departs daily from

Surfers Paradise and takes guests to prominent National Surfing Reserves as far as the border of New South Wales. A visit to Surf World Museum is also included in the price of A\$89 per adult.

JUPITERS HOTEL AND CASINO

Jupiters Hotel and Casino on the Gold Coast has unveiled the first of its refurbished Superior Deluxe Rooms as part of the hotel's A\$75 million transformation. Located on floors five to 17, the luxurious rooms feature bespoke bedheads, local artwork and natural wood finishes, along with The Star Entertainment Group's custom-created 'The Cloud' mattress topper. All 600 rooms in the hotel are on track to be completed by the end of this year.

THE MACKEREL ISLANDS

The Mackerel Islands, 22km off the coast of Onslow in Western Australia's Pilbara region, are open for business after a partial closure for renovation. Made up of 10 islands, Thevenard and Direction Islands offer accommodation, with Thevenard home to 13 refurbished beachfront cabins and Direction featuring just the one cabin for up to eight people. From diving and fishing to simply kicking back on the beach, there are daily ferry services between the islands for easy exploration.

OVOLO WOOLLOOMOOLOO

Sydney's Ovolo Woolloomooloo has launched its brand new event complex, after a massive renovation. The complex, set in a 100-year-old heritage-listed wharf, has rooms that can cater for events with 12 to 350 people.



From top: Kings Park, Perth; Jupiters Hotel and Casino, the Gold Coast; Ovolo Woolloomooloo

HOT THEMES



From left: Dine in breathtaking environs, such as with Uluru or Ayers Rocks in the background; take on the Great Ocean Walk; cuddle a koala at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary

GOURMET LURES

Tourism Australia's Restaurant Australia campaign has successfully positioned the destination as one with varied gourmet lures. But one fine dining experience not to be missed is the 'Tali Wiru' or 'beautiful dune' in local Anangu language, which sees visitors enjoy a four-course meal under the stars overlooking Uluru. This starts at sunset with champagne and canapés, and ends around a fire with hot chocolate or cognac in the company of an indigenous storyteller talking about the Aboriginal culture.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

Victoria's the Great Ocean Road is one of the world's most scenic drives, but not many people know that winding alongside that is the Great Ocean Walk. The walk begins at Apollo Bay, two-and-a-half hours from Melbourne by car, and spans approximately 100km to the famous 12 Apostles. A number of tour operators run guided walks of various lengths and luxury levels, and the packages include camping, eco lodges and boutique accommodation. Be sure to have your cameras ready to capture the stunning views.

FAMILY FUN

Australia is one of the most family-friendly destinations in Asia-Pacific. And while in Australia, one should spot koalas. Tourism Australia names the You Yangs mountain range and Raymond Island in Victoria, Port Stephens in New South Wales, Kangaroo Island in South Australia and the Noosa Headland National Park in Queensland as the top five places to see the native marsupial in its natural habitat. For guaranteed sightings and a cuddle, visit Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary on the Gold Coast.



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Melbourne, Australia



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Declining travel trends are among the reasons cited by the tourism authorities for Brunei's weaker arrivals in 1Q2016; Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque is one of the main landmarks in the Sultanate

BRUNEI

By S Puvaneswary

The total number of tourist arrivals to the Sultanate had fallen 2.8 per cent to 56,431 in 1Q2016 as compared to the corresponding period in 2015. A release by Brunei's Tourism Development Department of the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism attributed the decline to "annual seasonal fluctuation, declining trend in travel demand and negative growth from the main source markets comprising Australia and New Zealand that have decreased by 18.2 per cent, followed by (South-east Asia) by 4.6 per cent, and longhaul markets by 1.1 per cent year-on-year".

South-east Asia provided the bulk of Brunei's tourist arrivals in that period, contributing 52.4 per cent of total arrivals. The Far East followed next with a 23.8 per cent contribution, while Europe and the Middle East contributed 12.6 per cent.

There are, however, growth markets. In 1Q2016, arrivals from China, Hong Kong and Japan rose 8.3 per cent over 1Q2015.

In that same period, the top five arrival markets for Brunei were Malaysia which made up 25.8 per cent of total arrivals, followed by China, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore. This quintet contributed 66.3 per cent of total tourist arrivals by air into Brunei. According to the release, Malaysia's stellar performance was made possible by easy air access and close proximity to Brunei.

KEY CONTACTS

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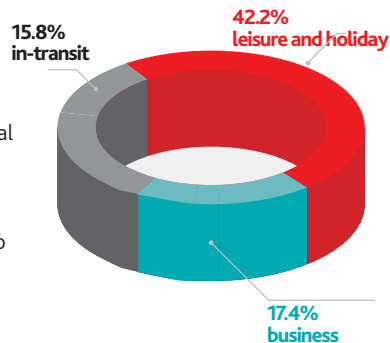
5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ★ The tourism industry was given greater attention when the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources transitioned into the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism. With this change, inbound tourism players are hopeful that the tourism industry will strengthen and the local community will reap its rewards in 2017.
- ★ In August 2016, the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism partnered with the Laksmana College of Business to introduce specialised training courses for the country's tourist guides. Two courses were offered: A bridging course for existing tour guides and a full course for new and upcoming tour guides. These ran for approximately 40 hours and 150 hours respectively. These courses will enhance the professionalism of Brunei's tourist guides and encourage more young people to join the tourism business.
- ★ Brunei has made it easier for Chinese tourists to visit by introducing a single entry visa that is issued on arrival and which grants up to 14 days of stay. This was implemented on May 1. China has traditionally been Brunei's second largest inbound market, after Malaysia. The visa-on-arrival facility is expected to result in a spike in Chinese arrivals during the coming peak Chinese New Year travel season in 2017.
- ★ Brunei's capital Bandar Seri Begawan has been declared the City of Culture for 2016-2017 during the 12th ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and Arts in August 2016, a status endorsed by ASEAN culture and arts ministers. Activities in the form of exhibitions and festivals held in the capital city will raise awareness of Brunei as a tourist destination, especially among regional travellers.
- ★ Community based tourism will gain importance in 2017. Brunei wants to promote homestays to ensure the participation of local communities to promote tourism as a way of diversifying its economy.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

56,431

/ The number of international visitors to Brunei via Brunei International Airport in 1Q2016. The bulk of this – 42.2 per cent – was made up of holidaymakers.



40.7

/ The average Brunei hotel occupancy rate in percentage in 1Q2016, up from 37.3 per cent in 1Q2015.



2.2

/ The average length of stay – in days – of tourists in the 1Q2016, compared with 2.1 days in the same period in 2015.

4,084

/ The total number of hotel rooms in Brunei.



58

/ The total number of registered travel agents in Brunei.



Source: Tourism Development Department, the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017

Inbound tourism players paint a picture on tourism prospects for 2017.



“Regional markets will continue to dominate travel into Brunei (due to good air accessibility). (These markets) will see growth provided the regional economy improves and there are no calamities.”

Khirul Zainie, managing director, MegaBorneo Tour Planner

“Brunei’s tourism industry will advance because of many reasons: continued regional traffic; Bandar Seri Begawan’s recognition as the ASEAN City of Culture for 2016-2017 which will attract overseas markets; and a weekly chartered flight from Zhengzhou, China using Royal Brunei Airlines since July 2016, which will encourage Chinese interest in Brunei.”

CP Foo, general manager, Century Travel Centre



“I think Chinese arrivals into Brunei may grow in 2017 on the back of the country’s new single entry, visa-on-arrival facility for up to 14 days. I think regional traffic may also rise since ASEAN tourism ministers have been pushing for regional travel.”

Adam Tan, managing director, Travelhub



Tuck into a feast that is typical of Hari Raya Aidilfitri

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Jun 26-27, 2017

HARI RAYA AIDILFITRI

This important religious festival in Brunei marks the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan, when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. When Ramadhan draws to a close, the Sultan of Brunei will open his official residence in Bandar Seri Begawan to the public where celebratory feasts will be hosted by him and his wife. Elsewhere, people celebrate with extensive feasting and get-togethers with loved ones.

Aug 2017

BIMP-EAGA FRUIT FESTIVAL

Organised by the Brunei Darussalam BIMP-EAGA Business Council, this festival is aimed at promoting local fruits and a healthy lifestyle, besides encouraging trade in that sector between Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.



From top: Parkview Hotel Brunei; glamping at Sumbiling Eco Village; Eco Adventure Park and Rainforest Lodge

WHAT'S NEW

PARKVIEW HOTEL BRUNEI

Formerly known as LR Asma Hotel, this 123-room hotel in Jerudong was rebranded as Parkview Hotel Brunei in 2015 after management changed hands to Times Square Group of Companies. Built for leisure and business travellers, the hotel has six meeting rooms, a banquet hall, a gym, an outdoor pool and separate Jacuzzi and sauna for men and women.

It is close to main attractions like Jerudong Park Children Playground, Polo Club and Royal Brunei Golf and Country Club, as well as BRIDEX Convention Hall, the destination's main MICE venue. Brunei International Airport and central Bandar Seri Begawan is 20 minutes away by car.

GLAMPING AT SUMBILING ECO VILLAGE

Sumbiling Eco Village has expanded its facilities to include four outdoor lodges for those keen on camping in comfort in the Temburong rainforest.

Unlike conventional camping, glamp (a combination of the words glam and camp) tents come assembled and with basic amenities and access to nearby bathrooms, kitchens and outdoor activities. The glamp tents vary in size, with the largest being able to accommodate up to four people. More of such tents are reportedly being built now to accommodate the growing interest in glamping.

ESCAPE SQUARE

Escape Square is an indoor adventure attraction located in Abdul Razak Complex. Participants have four rooms to play in, each with a different theme: Murder in the office; Kidnapping in the classroom; the Scorpio's Killer Residence; The Pirate Ship: Blackbeard's Treasure. Small groups of up to six people must work together to solve puzzles and clues within 60 minutes. Observation and critical thinking skills are put to the test.

KG SUNGAI BUNGA HOMESTAY

Kg Sungai Bunga fishing village has a few houses offering rooms to tourists who are interested in first-hand experiences of the local culture through short stays with a local family. Demonstrations of making prawn crackers and *mukun* performances, where traditional drums accompany a group of singers, can be arranged with advance notice.

ECO ADVENTURE PARK AND RAINFOREST LODGE

Freme Travels' new Eco Adventure Park and refurbished Rainforest Lodge promise exciting activities and modern comforts in a pristine rainforest. Fun new highlights at the Park includes a 135m flying fox, a high rope bridge course, a hanging bridge across the river, a canopy platform for bird watching and a tower for viewing. The lodge can accommodate more than 40 people in new wooden bunker beds and a further 15 or so in large tents. There is also a new terrace dining area and kitchen.

HOT THEMES



From left: Tasek Merimbun Heritage Park offers boat rides, jungle treks and more; tuck into an *Ambuyat* meal; chance upon playful children at Ulu Temburong National Park



FAMILY FUN

Brunei has a plethora of attractions that will suit visitors of all ages, but for the time-strapped family, an all-in-one attraction can be found in the form of Tasek Merimbun Heritage Park. Regarded as the only South-east Asian heritage park in Brunei, visitors can take a boat ride on Brunei's largest black water lake, enjoy a leisurely picnic by the lake, visit the museum or the Butterfly Garden, and go on a jungle trek.

GOURMET LURES

Bruneians are very family oriented and they love to gather around an *Ambuyat* meal, which is a local specialty. The staple is sago paste, which is served with a choice of side dishes and dipping sauce. Experience an *Ambuyat* meal at Aminah Arif restaurant on the ground floor of Bangunan Haji Abdul Rahman Building in Kiulap. The *Ambuyat* Special course includes a variety of meat and vegetable dishes.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

With more than 70 per cent of the country under tropical rainforest cover, Brunei is a nature lover's paradise. It offers a variety of green adventures and marine activities. For an adventure in nature, visit Ulu Temburong National Park, the crown jewel of Brunei's prized green spaces. There are many experiences to savour, from watching gibbons forage along the river, to tackling the rapids on the Temburong river.



G
LeGallery Suites
HOTEL

LEALLERY SUITES HOTEL

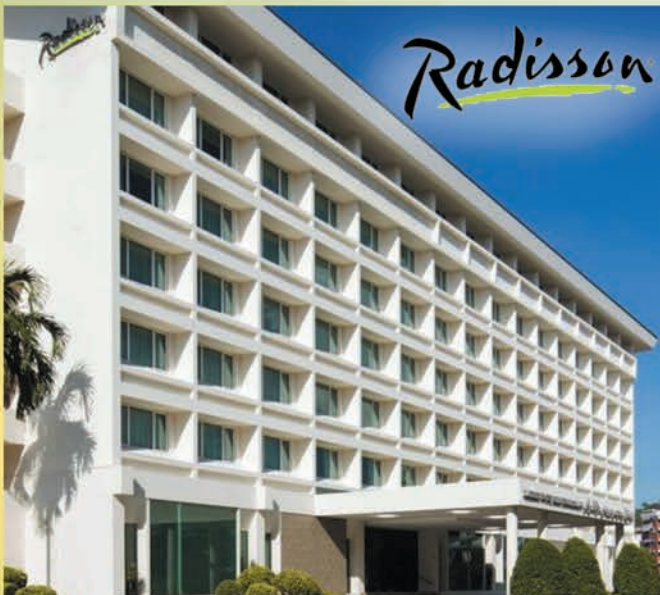
KM 2.5 Jln Tutong, Crowne Princess Complex,
Seri Complex, BSB BA 1779, Brunei Darussalam



BADI'AH HOTEL

BADI'AH HOTEL

Mile 1 1/4, Jalan Tutong, BA1712
Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam



Radisson

RADISSON HOTEL BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

P O Box 2203 Jalan Tasek, BS8674
Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei



Rizqun
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Abdul Razak Complex Gadong,
Bandar Seri Begawan BE3519, Brunei Darussalam



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Improved air links and friendly visa processes are in place to help Cambodia achieve its goal of 7.5 million arrivals by 2020; the majestic Angkor Wat pictured above

CAMBODIA

By Marissa Carruthers

Cambodia is on its way to hitting its target of 7.5 million international arrivals by 2020, after enjoying a 3.4 per cent rise between January and July 2016.

The latest figures released by the Ministry of Tourism reveal the country welcomed more than 2,756,693 foreign travellers, compared with 2,666,315 the previous year.

Despite a 1.6 per cent decrease in footfalls, Vietnam led as top source market. China followed in second place and recorded a 12.4 per cent increase in arrivals.

In July 2016 alone, a total of 395,761 arrivals were recorded – an 8.6 per cent year-on-year increase.

Phnom Penh retained the largest amount of tourists in the first seven months of 2016, accounting for 51.8 per cent of visits, while Siem Reap took 38.5 per cent.

The coastal district – which is undergoing a beautification scheme to spruce up the beach area around Sihanoukville – had a market share of 8.8 per cent, while eco-tourism made up 0.9 per cent of visits.

Ecotourism is an area the government aims to build on in the future, and is currently in talks to develop an eco-tourism plan mapping out how to effectively and sustainably develop the sector across the country's expansive countryside.

KEY CONTACTS

MINISTRY OF TOURISM www.tourismcambodia.org

THE CAMBODIA HOTEL ASSOCIATION
www.cambodiahotelassociation.com.kh

CAMBODIA RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION
www.cambodiarestaurantassociation.com.kh

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ★ In September, All Nippon Airways launched the first direct flight linking Tokyo and Phnom Penh in a move that is hoped will help attract the 300,000 Japanese visitors the Cambodian Ministry of Tourism is targeting by 2020.
- ★ In August, the Angkor Institution said it will hike up ticket prices to enter Angkor Archaeological Park from February. A one-day ticket will increase from US\$20 to US\$37. Agents fear this will have a negative effect on tourism to the popular World Heritage site.
- ★ From September, foreign visitors from certain countries, including China, Japan and South Korea, can access three-year, multiple entry business and tourist visas. It is hoped the move will drive more repeat visits and help the Cambodian government hit its target of 7.5 million visitors by 2020.
- ★ In June, the Ministry of Tourism unveiled its China Ready plan. This includes encouraging businesses to accept the yuan, having more Chinese-speaking guides and hospitality workers, and putting in place signage and facilities catering to the market. Cambodia hopes to welcome two million Chinese visitors by 2020.
- ★ In March, Cambodia Airports unveiled the US\$100 million renovations at Siem Reap and Phnom Penh international airports. This includes new terminals at each, doubling total airport capacity from five to 10 million. Plans to build a new domestic terminal in the capital was announced in July.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

2,756,693

/ The number of international arrivals in Cambodia between January and July, representing a 3.4 per cent increase.



53.8

/ The percentage of international visitors who arrived in Cambodia by air, with Siem Reap receiving 28.1 per cent, Phnom Penh 24.7 per cent and Sihanoukville, 0.9 per cent.



552,619

/ The number of Vietnamese tourists who travelled to Cambodia between January and July, the country's number one source market.



66,220

/ The number of Chinese visitors in July, a rise of 9.1 per cent, thanks to a series of initiatives to attract more visitors from the market.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017

“We expect inbound figures to remain much as they are in 2016. Our neighbours Vietnam and Laos are (gaining) popularity, accessibility and exposure. We're making changes at the resort to become an all-suite concept so that more luxury travellers will turn to us, and we're set to be the destination's authority for adventure travel in 2017.”

Anthony Borantin, general manager, Anantara Angkor Resort



“Given the popularity of Cambodia as a destination and the relative ease of travel from Australia to Cambodia, the Australian market will continue to be a key market for Intrepid. Nevertheless for our short-break programmes and Urban Adventures, which are one to three days, there is a growth in the number of guests from surrounding countries including Singapore, India, China and Hong Kong.”

Jo Crisp, general manager, PEAK Cambodia

“With new added frequency of flights from neighbouring countries like Singapore, travel to Cambodia in 2017 looks very promising. In addition, plans for new services from Siem Reap to Hanoi, Danang, Shanghai and Guangzhou are lined up to target the Chinese and Vietnamese travellers. Cambodia aims to hire an additional 200,000 trained travel professionals to fulfil the target of receiving seven million tourists by 2020.

Kenneth Loor, Country Manager- Cambodia & Myanmar, Asiatravel.com Holdings



From top: Celebrate the Khmer New Year or Chol Chnam Thmei; Tonle Sap River buzzes with festivity during Bom Om Thook

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Apr 13-17, 2017

CHOL CHNAM THMEI

This is the Khmer New Year, one of the most important festivals in the Cambodian calendar when Cambodians mark the start of the New Year and monsoon season, and the end of the harvest season.

Sep 19-21, 2017

PCHUM BEN

Also known as Ancestors Day, Cambodians celebrate the festival by returning to their homeland to remember dead relatives. Celebrations last for 15 days, with rituals held in temples.

Nov 13-15, 2017

BOM OM THOOK

Commonly known as Water Festival, this marks the reversal of the Tonle Sap River, with celebrations including boat races across the country. Phnom Penh gets especially lively during this period.



From top: Sokha Siem Reap Resort and Convention Centre; Grand Phnom Penh Water Park; S&P Thai Restaurant & Bakery

WHAT'S NEW

GARDEN CITY HOTEL AND GOLF

Opened on October 1, Garden City Hotel & Golf about 20km outside of Phnom Penh is a sprawling estate occupying 3,000 hectares of land. It boasts 254 rooms, a high-end spa, fine dining outlets, a large pool and a kids' club. It is also equipped with a range of meeting rooms and conference spaces, including a ballroom for up to 1,500 people, and a business centre. An 18-hole championship golf course sits next door.

SOKHA SIEM REAP RESORT AND CONVENTION CENTRE

The first phase of Sokha Siem Reap Resort and Convention Centre opened in September, offering 224 rooms, a swimming pool and a conference centre – the country's second largest hotel conference facility after Sokha Phnom Penh. By 1Q2017, the resort open fully with 776 rooms. Set amid lush tropical gardens, the resort is located close to the entrance of Angkor Wat Archaeological Park.

GRAND PHNOM PENH WATER PARK

Opened in April, Grand Phnom Penh Water Park packs wet and wild medieval-themed fun into 8,000m² of brightly coloured slides and iridescent blue pools. Located to the north of Phnom Penh, the attraction is within the semi-developed, 260ha gated Grand Phnom Penh International City. The castle-shaped main building contains a café, gym, children's playroom, changing facilities, swimsuit vendors and seating areas.

ALCHEMY GASTROPUB

After almost two years in the making, Alchemy GastroPub opened its doors in the capital's Toul Tom Pong area, bringing with it a touch of class. Set in a Khmer wooden house, the venue adopts a contemporary style and offers a comprehensive range of cocktails and food. Diners can choose to sit indoors, on the large terrace in front, or cosy up in the outdoor section at the back.

SUN & MOON, URBAN HOTEL

Situated within walking distance from the Phnom Penh's major attractions and just a few hundred metres from the busy riverside, Sun & Moon, Urban Hotel positions itself as an affordable, hip hotel. Vibrant colours and art feature strongly in the interior. Facilities include an infinity pool, gym, spa, three F&B outlets, a 12-seat boardroom and a meeting room for 25 pax.

S&P THAI RESTAURANT & BAKERY

In September, popular Thai brand S&P opened its doors in Phnom Penh, serving up a variety of classic Thai and international food in grand colonial settings. The restaurant offers VIP rooms and a spacious dining area.

HOT THEMES



From left: Make meaningful connections through Ayana Journeys' Learn from the Locals day trip; discover local favourites at Malis restaurant; go on a romantic retreat at Phum Baitang Hotel, Siem Reap



RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

In a country where poverty is rife, responsible travel has a huge role to play in Cambodia, with many operators urging visitors not to indulge in the often detrimental voluntourism and orphanage tours on offer. Ayana Journeys specialises in educational travel, offering a range of responsible alternatives, such as Learn from the Locals day trips. These range from meaningful connections with farmers to learn about rice farming and exploring Animist beliefs and superstitions from storytellers.

GOURMET LURES

Cambodian cuisine is often overshadowed by that of its neighbours Vietnam and Thailand, but the country is home to a host of delicacies too, such as fish amok and beef lok lak. Siem Reap Food Tours, run by two food lovers, offers an insight into local street food, market life and an opportunity to cook a few dishes of your own. There are also many authentic restaurants to sample. Malis, owned by Cambodian celebrity chef Luu Meng, in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap cannot be missed.

ROMANTIC MOMENTS

From its untouched islands through to the rural countryside, Cambodia is home to a host of stunning and isolated spots that make the perfect place for high-end romance. Song Saa Private Island sits off the coast and boasts a range of sumptuous facilities to fan the flames of passion. Another seductive option is Phum Baitang which opened in Siem Reap in late 2015. Set amid lush gardens and paddy fields, the resort boasts a cocoon of understated luxury in Temple Town's surrounding countryside.



Pacific Hotel
Siem Reap
★★★★★

PACIFIC HOTEL SIEM REAP

Road No. 6, Kaksekam Village
Sror Nge Commune, Siem Reap, Cambodia



TEMPLATION
ANGKOR

TEMPLATION HOTEL SIEM REAP

Rok Rak Street, Modul 3, Phum Sla Kram,
Siem Reap, Cambodia



Mémoire d'Angkor
Boutique Hotel & Spa Siem Reap & Cambodia

MEMOIRE D'ANGKORE BOUTIQUE HOTEL

#54, Sivatha Boulevard
Siem Reap, Cambodia



Prince D' Angkor
HOTEL & SPA

PRINCE D' ANGKOR HOTEL & SPA

Sivatha Blv, Mondul II, Sangkat Svay
Dangkum, Siem Reap 93136 Cambodia



REGENCY ANGKOR

REGENCY ANGKOR HOTEL SIEM REAP

Vithei Charles De Gaule, Phum Mondul III,
Khun Storkram, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Cambodia, though still a developing country has seen a lot of changes over the past years. TAcetre offers more than 1,100 hotels in 8 main cities of Cambodia, and over 100 land package combinations, all on instant confirmation!



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Shanghai was among the top three destinations in China for tourism in 1H2016, welcoming four million foreign travellers in that period

CHINA

By Caroline Boey

China saw a 3.8 per cent increase in total visitors arrivals, or 67.9 million, in 1H2016, with 13.5 million coming from outside of China. Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan contributed the bulk of China's foreign arrivals.

China expects to see an increase of 4.1 per cent in 2H2016 and total visitor arrivals of 72 million, according to Travel China Guide with data sourced from the China National Tourism Administration.

Tourism revenue in 1H2016 was US\$57 billion, an increase of 5.3 per cent over the same period in 2015, and 2H2016 estimates put tourism revenue at US\$65 billion, an increase of 5.2 per cent.

Of the major source markets in 1H2016, Asia contributed 43.2 million visitors, or 63.7 per cent of the inbound pie, with Hong Kong taking the lion's share at 40 million. Visitors from Europe and the US were 12.8 million and 8.4 million, making up 18.9 per cent and 12.4 per cent respectively.

Outside Greater China, South Korea was the top source market, contributing 13.3 million visitors in 1H2016, and with Japan, the US, Vietnam, Russia, the Philippines, Mongolia, Malaysia, Singapore and India completing the top 10 list.

As for purpose of visit, sightseeing formed the largest group at 31.2 per cent, or 21.2 million, followed by business travel forming 14.8 per cent with 13.7 million.

China's top three destinations in 1H2016 were Beijing, Shanghai and Xi'an and they received two million, four million and 1.3 million foreign visitors respectively. For Beijing, US arrivals formed the bulk with 353,000 footfalls; for Shanghai it is South Korea with 369,011 visitors; and for Xi'an South Korea, the US and the UK were top three markets.

KEY CONTACTS

CHINA NATIONAL TOURISM ADMINISTRATION

www.cnta.gov.cn/glen

SHANGHAI MUNICIPAL TOURISM ADMINISTRATION

www.meet-in-shanghai.net

CIVIL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION OF CHINA

www.caac.gov.cn

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

✦ Air access is improving and going deeper into China, as more international flights are now operating to China's secondary cities. United Airlines, for instance, inaugurated its San Francisco-Xi'an service in May, while new regional and international flights commenced operations to Sanya from Frankfurt, Ho Chi Minh City and Kaohsiung in the first half of 2016. They join 14 flights that started since the beginning of 2015 from Japan, South Korea, Russia, Thailand, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

✦ The April soft opening of Shanghai Tower, the second tallest building in the world after Dubai's Burj Khalifa, and the May opening of international outlet shopping mall Shanghai Village adjacent to the Shanghai Disney Resort, add new icons and dimensions to the city's status as a world tourism destination.

✦ The final stage implementation of China's comprehensive value-added tax (VAT) reform in May created a minor impact in the end, but the lack of clear guidelines caught businesses offguard. Hotels were initially going to charge an additional six per cent on top of the 15 per cent service charge and government tax (made up of 10 per cent service charge and five per cent business tax). But after much discussion and negotiation, the majority revised it to a 10 per cent service charge and six per cent government VAT.

✦ Efforts to improve the environment in the run-up to the 2016 G20 summit in Hangzhou in September have paid off. Inspired industry players in China say the tourism authorities in Beijing and Shanghai, in particular, need to do more to highlight the better conditions, a critical factor in securing international corporate incentive events.

✦ The granting of 10-year visas to American citizens at the end of 2014 has helped the US jump to the number three spot among China's key source market in 1H2016, compared to the fourth position for the whole of 2015. The US dollar exchange rate also dropped from RMB6.20 (US\$1) in the beginning of the year to RMB6.54 in the third quarter.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

67.9

/ In millions, the number of foreigners who visited China in 1H2016, a rise of 3.8 per cent compared to the same period the previous year.



3

/ The ranking of the US as a source market for China in 1H2016. China and the US launched the 2016 China-US Tourism Year in March after an announcement by Chinese president Xi Jinping and US President Barack Obama during the former's state visit to the US last September.



57

/ In billions, income in US dollars generated by inbound tourism in 1H2016, an increase of 5.3 per cent over the same period in 2015.



13.3

/ In millions, the number of visitor arrivals from South Korea in 1H2016, China's top overseas source country.



4.1

/ In percentage, the estimated increase of overseas visitors in 2H2016 and a total of 72 million, while income generated by inbound tourism is expected to reach US\$65 billion.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017

“(While China's) inbound market pales in comparison to its outbound numbers, it does not mean China is unattractive as a holiday destination. It has just as many stunning locations, attractions, cultural diversity, deep history and variety of recreation options as other popular countries. China is already the top holiday destination for many Asian markets and when its infrastructure, branding and communication improve further, it will achieve equal status as its source market reputation.”

Fred Seow, CEO, TAcenre.com



“We are keeping an open outlook for 2017. Lead times are getting shorter, with many pharmaceutical meetings taking place within a two/three-week time span. (What's in our favour are) the intensifying competition among hotels, as there are new hotels opening all the time, and improving environment in the big cities.”

Violet Wang, destination manager, Pacific World, China



“Overall, MICE in China is making a comeback compared with previous years, especially for incentives. Lead times look to be lengthening a bit in some cases and clients are now planning trips for 2017 and 2018. Leisure destinations like Zhangjiajie, Hunan and Jiuzhaigou, Sichuan are becoming more popular (with) foreigners, while Suzhou, Jiangsu has done a lot of overseas promotion lately, especially in North America, and we are seeing rising interest from our clients.”

Kaci McAllister, deputy general manager, Destination Asia (China)



“We will be getting more large groups in 2017 and Australia is doing well, especially (events from the) commodity, IT, insurance and finance companies. Our target is to grow the business from the UK and the US, which are big markets with business always.”

Cindy Zhang, CEO, Faces of China, China



Inner Mongolia's Naadam is a centuries-old festival of sports

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Jun 29, 2017
RED YAO FESTIVAL

Also known as Red Clothes Festival and Drying Clothes Festival, the ancient festival sees women of the Yao tribe in Longsheng County, Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region hanging out the most beautiful red clothes they own on the balcony. Performances of traditional knitting skills, folk sports, singing and dancing are also featured during the one-day festival.

Jun 30 - Jul 3, 2017
NAADAM

Naadam, or the Three Games of Men, is the biggest midsummer event in Inner Mongolia. The three featured games are wrestling, horseracing and archery. People of both genders and all ages take part, and winners are rewarded. The centuries-old Naadam was inscribed in 2010 by UNESCO on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Aug 15-17, 2017
TORCH FESTIVAL IN SICHUAN, GUIZHOU AND YUNNAN

Celebrated by the Yi people and other ethnic groups in the provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan, the Torch Festival is also called Fire Festival. Every family lights a torch at home and family members parade through the fields with torches to drive out bad luck and pray for a good harvest. A bonfire party is also held during this festival.

WHAT'S NEW

NEW WORLD RESORT · POWDER PARADISE SKI RESORT

Developed by Ascent International in collaboration with Changbai Mountain Development and Construction (Group) Co., and IMG, New World Resort · Powder Paradise Ski Resort lies in the western slope of Changbai Mountain Natural Reserve, with Tianchi Lake in the background. It lay claims to being the only natural ski resort within a nature reserve in China. Targeted to welcome skiers on December 15, 2016, the resort covers a ski area of over 1,000,000m², of which 47 per cent is high-class powder area. The longest ski slope runs 2,625m, with a vertical drop of almost 700m. With a snowfall period from the middle of November to the end of April in the following year, the resort boasts the longest snow season among other Chinese ski resorts.

WALDORF ASTORIA CHENGDU

The 289-room Waldorf Astoria Chengdu in Sichuan province will open in December 2016. Located in the Chengdu Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone, the hotel will feature meeting venues suitable for mid-size events, various F&B outlets such as Wall Street rooftop jazz bar on the 52nd floor, and other recreational facilities.

SEVEN-STAR BEAUTY CROWN GRAND-TREE HOTEL

Opened in January 2016, the Seven-star Beauty Crown Grand-Tree Hotel complex is a massive

development comprising a crown-shaped theatre and several tree-shaped hotel towers.

Run like a club, guests can join as a member for RMB5,000 (US\$750) and enjoy room rates starting from RMB98, buffet breakfast for RMB28, buffet lunch for RMB68 and buffet dinner for RMB88.

Facilities include 48 F&B outlets, 11 cinemas, including one IMAX Cinema, a 1,800m² Spa Center, a soon-to-open 300,000m² International Luxuries Flagship Store and its own bar street. It is also close to Sanya's bar street and is about 30-minute drive to the Sanya Phoenix International Airport.

SHANGHAI VILLAGE

Adjacent to Shanghai Disney Resort, Shanghai Village outlet mall opened in May with 140 high-end boutiques offering discounts of up to 75 per cent on a range of big-name fashion, homeware and lifestyle brands. Part of the Chic Outlet Shopping Collection, it is located within the sprawling Shanghai International Tourism and Resorts Zone and is accessible on Line 11 to Disney Resort Station, followed by a short five-minute bus ride or a 15-minute walk.

DISCOVERY ADVENTURES ANDAMAN MOGANSHAN PARK

Located in the Andaman Moganshan Resort in Huzhou, a two-hour drive from Shanghai, the park is an adventure destination that integrates extreme sports, adventure training experiences, and world-class outdoor survival programmes for leisure travellers and corporate groups. Facilities include China's biggest rock climbing wall, ziplines, ATV tours, mountain bike courses, hiking routes, and more.



From top: New World Resort · Powder Paradise Ski Resort; Seven-star Beauty Crown Grand-Tree Hotel

HOT THEMES



From left: Help restore the Great Wall of China; take the journey of a lifetime up Mount Everest, from Tibet Base Camp; explore Tengchong's geothermal park and get to know the county's ethnic tribes

FAMILY FUN

China's deep history can provide some interesting family-friendly activities for travellers. As the longest man-made structure and one of the wonders of the world, the Great Wall of China is a must on a trip to Beijing. Visitors can make their own mark in history by helping to restore an ancient section of the wall. Guided by a preservation team, visitors will hand lay three bricks using the same materials – including mortar that contains sticky rice – used centuries ago. This experience is a special highlight for families with children, as it allows them to get their hands dirty while learning about a fascinating period of Chinese history.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

China's mountain ranges provide varied hiking opportunities to amateurs and professionals alike. For an easier hike, Moganshan National Park near Hangzhou is a good option, with scenic pine and bamboo forests and waterfalls to explore.

Serious climbers will prefer to hit the Everest Base Camp in Tibet. It takes two days in a private van to get from Lhasa to the base camp and for the intrepid traveller, it is the final frontier. It is quite easily the journey of a lifetime as there are endless opportunities to witness remote cultural events, join in the celebration of ancient traditions and explore landscapes like nowhere else on Earth.

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Tengchong County, situated in the western part of Yunnan and sharing a 151km border with Myanmar, was a vital link on the ancient Silk Road. Its population of approximately 490,000 people are extremely diverse, consisting of more than 10 different Chinese ethnic minorities such as the Dai, Hui and Wa. Tengchong is a well-known young volcanic and geothermal area in China and is listed as a National Geological Park. The beautiful traditional village of Heshun has managed to retain much of the peace, harmony and simplicity that many other rural communities have lost due to rapid commercialisation in the last 10 years.



Radisson BLU

RADISSON BLU HOTEL SHANGHAI NEW WORLD

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200003 Shanghai, China



NOVOTEL BEIJING SANYUAN

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100028 Beijing, China



FULL DAY YANODA RAINFOREST TOUR

Hainan, China



FULL DAY FORBIDDEN CITY TOUR

Beijing, China



CHANGBAISHAN SKI RESORT

Jilin, China

China has become one of the strongest source market for travellers to destinations worldwide. Having recently launched TAcenre, our offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu under the local brand of 汇订网 or TAcenre.cn, are looking forward to serve over 30,000 travel agencies in China with our more than 8 million (s.k.u.) products in the system in full Chinese language supported by local credit card payments like Alipay, UnionPay and Wechat Pay.



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Hong Kong is running two new campaigns targeted at the shorthaul market, which grew 5.7 per cent in the first seven months of 2016

HONG KONG

By Prudence Lui

Visitor arrivals in the first seven months of 2016 reached 32,209,296. Despite a six per cent drop, growth in the shorthaul and longhaul markets increased 5.7 per cent and 2.8 per cent respectively. Meanwhile, international overnight arrivals also improved, with 10.6 per cent and 3.2 per cent growth in the shorthaul and longhaul markets respectively.

However, China, a key shorthaul source market China remained sluggish. Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), executive director, Anthony Lau, said: "Since the tightening of the Individual Visit Scheme by the government and the replacement of multiple entries to one trip per week, the number of visitors from mainland China has dropped. The good news is mainland Chinese FITs started coming back since March and there was an 8.7 per cent increase in July."

Terrorist attacks in Europe and Thailand this year are expected to have a negative impact on Chinese travellers and numbers to those destinations are likely to drop significantly. Nearby Hong Kong, considered to be a safer place to visit, may benefit from Chinese travellers switching their travel plans there.

Meanwhile, HKTB has strengthened collaboration with its trade partners, hotels, and attractions and has rolled out two campaigns – Family Fun and Getaway to Hong Kong, targeted at shorthaul markets.

KEY CONTACTS

HONG KONG TOURISM BOARD www.discoverhongkong.com
HONG KONG ASSOCIATION OF TRAVEL AGENTS www.hata.org.hk
HONG KONG HOTEL ASSOCIATION hkha.org/en/contact

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ✦ To fund the building of the third runway, Hong Kong International Airport implemented the controversial airport construction fee, in August. It covers both origin-destination and transit passengers. The industry is worried the fee will put a dent in the city's reputation as an attractive destination.
- ✦ The opening of MTR South Island Line (East) at the end of 2016 will connect Ocean Park, Wong Chuk Hang, Lei Tung and South Horizons to central Hong Kong and the easy access will create a new tourist district for tourists to explore.
- ✦ Hong Kong tourism authorities are set to introduce food trucks at attractions around the city with an aim to add vibrancy to the destinations. The initiative first started as part of Hong Kong's 2015-16 Budget Speech and will finally come into fruition by end-2016. The eight designated tourist spots to feature food trucks include the Golden Bauhinia Square; Central Harbourfront Event Space; Ocean Park; Tsim Sha Tsui Salisbury Garden; Tsim Sha Tsui Art Square; Energizing Kowloon East Venue 1; Wong Tai Sin Square; and Hong Kong Disneyland.
- ✦ The government's initiative to remove fees at museums of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department came into effect in August for the permanent exhibitions of four museums. Entry to the Hong Kong Museum of History, Hong Kong Heritage Museum, Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence and Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum) is now free of charge. The authorities hope this will help raise the cultural appeal of the destination.
- ✦ Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong has launched the 2016/17 *Hong Kong Rewards!* programme, introducing new and enhanced privileges for MICE delegates visiting Hong Kong. Among the perks is a chance to enjoy complimentary cocktail receptions at 40 hotel venues; exclusive group shots, priority seating at the Festival of the Lion King show and a 15-minute CEO procession at Hong Kong Disneyland; welcome drink and souvenir at Ocean Park Hong Kong; up to HK\$2,000 in shopping and dining discounts at some 400 airport restaurants and shops for each delegate; and complimentary cultural performances such as traditional lion and dragon dances.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

87

/ The percentage of mainland Chinese travelling to Hong Kong as FITs.



5.7

/ The growth in visitor arrivals from the shorthaul markets in the first seven months of 2016. In addition, the number of overnight arrivals (month-to-month) increased about 10 per cent in most of the months.

2.8

3.2

/ The growth in longhaul visitor arrivals and overnight arrivals, which increased 2.8 per cent and 3.2 per cent respectively. The US and Australia contributed the biggest shares.



PROJECTIONS FOR 2017

“We tend to speak of a bad year when occupancy drops slightly. However, when we put it in a global context, Hong Kong is and will remain one of the top world destinations for both business and leisure. The market is facing some challenges in terms of currencies as well as a slowdown in overnight stays from mainland China, which will most likely prevail in 2017. Coupled with a significant number of new hotel rooms, the city will not see as much growth as we have been used to in the past. But in my view, Hong Kong as a destination is safe, well organised with an attractive legal environment for businesses, on top of being an exciting and dynamic Asian hub. Therefore, I would expect to see some moderate growth for Hong Kong tourism.”



Gerhard Aicher, general manager, The Mira Hong Kong

“I am hopeful for Hong Kong in 2017 based on its wonderful geographic location and the size of the destination. This compact city is one of the safest in the world, offering not only an extremely high standard of safety but hygienic conditions too. A number of high quality hotels will open in 2017 and they will give clients more options. Many hotels are also offering room rates which are very competitive against those in the neighbouring cities.”

Ivy Sung, CEO, Faces of Hong Kong

“Leisure traffic won't be good (in 2017) as our longhaul clients are making ad hoc or very last-minute bookings. Although overall hotel rates are down, they still higher than other Asian destinations. That's why we have lost a lot of (event) bids. Fortunately, we have a growing number of local academic conferences, so that really helps.”

Doris Lam, general manager, Momentous Asia Travel and Events



“The diversity of inbound tourism in Hong Kong is increasing every year, with more coming from all over the world to see the pristine urban lifestyle Hong Kong has to offer. Where else will you see a picturesque view of skyscrapers set against the sea and mountains? Hong Kong also has four seasons, which tourists love.”

Lara Sayo, country manager – Hong Kong and Macau, Asiatravel.com Holdings



Tai Hang Fire Dragon Dance is unique to Hong Kong, conducted before the Mid-Autumn Festival

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Oct 3-5, 2017
**TAI HANG FIRE
DRAGON DANCE**

Tai Hang Fire Dragon Dance is a prelude to Mid-Autumn Festival in Hong Kong. Created by Tai Hang villagers in the 19th century to ward off bad luck, the dance is still practised today. Participants build a fire dragon with straw and cover it with joss sticks, then light it at night. The burning dragon is then paraded through the streets of Tai Hang.

Apr 30 - May 4, 2017
**CHEUNG CHAU
BUN FESTIVAL**

Cheung Chau Bun Festival, celebrated by the natives of Cheung Chau island, has over 100 years of history. Every year, thousands of people descend upon Cheung Chau, an outlying island of Hong Kong, for the Piu Sik (Floating Colours) Parade and Lucky Bun (Ping On Bun) scramble competition, an ancient custom during the weeklong event.

Aug 23 - Sep 22, 2017
**HUNGRY GHOST
FESTIVAL**

Despite its frightful name, this festival, held during the seventh month of the lunar calendar, presents a unique opportunity for visitors to witness ancestor worship in modern Hong Kong. People burn offerings of faux money and elaborate papercraft modeled after real material objects for ghosts and their ancestors to use in the afterlife.



From top: Grand Hyatt Hong Kong; Ani-com Park@Harbour Fun; Hong Kong Movie Tour

WHAT'S NEW

GRAND HYATT HONG KONG

Refurbishment of Grand Hyatt Hong Kong's largest suites has completed in August, marking the culmination of a four-year renovation project at the hotel. The two 400m² Presidential Suites follow separate aesthetics, namely Classic Traditional and Contemporary Eclectic, while the 110m² Ambassador Suites are evocative of the Bohemian Chic and Aristocratic Adventurer. The smaller 80m² Diplomat Suites are inspired by Oriental Chic and Feminine Aristocrat themes. All suite guests are given access to the Grand Club Lounge, also newly-renovated.

KERRY HOTEL HONG KONG

Opening in December 2016, the 546-room Kerry Hotel Hong Kong is perched on Kowloon's waterfront, at the heart of Hung Hom Bay. Positioned as a five-star urban resort, it will also cater to business events with extensive meeting and banqueting facilities. With the opening of the Whampoa MTR station in 4Q2016, the hotel can be easily accessed by train, ferry and bus. Innovations at the hotel include keyless entry to the guestrooms, an e-concierge service and a complimentary minibar.

HONG KONG DISNEYLAND RESORT

The opening of the Iron Man Experience at Hong Kong Disneyland Resort in late-2016 marks the first Marvel ride-through attraction in a Disney Park. Situated at Stark Expo in Tomorrowland, guests will experience battling the invading Hydra forces and meet Iron Man in an immersive, story-driven character greeting. The 750-room Disney Explorers Lodge at Hong Kong Disneyland Resort,

scheduled to open in 2017, will enhance the resort's capacity to accommodate leisure and business groups.

ANI-COM PARK@HARBOUR FUN

Exhibits at the Ani-com Park@Harbour Fun comprise 30 favourite classic animated/comic characters that reflect Hong Kong's culture and way of life, such as Old Master Q, McDull and Chinese Hero. They make perfect scenes for fun selfies. The outdoor attraction is located at the Wan Chai Temporary Promenade near the Golden Bauhinia Square.

ATTITUDE ON GRANVILLE

This 81-room Attitude on Granville hotel is inspired by early-1970s and 1980s old Hong Kong. Situated at Granville Road in Tsim Sha Tsui, each room features wall graphics and nostalgic touches, which can also be found in the lobby. White local public housing walls, vintage letter boxes, retro pay phones and the reception desk, made out of local market plastic crates, greet guests. The guestrooms are categorised into Urban, Cozy, Elite and Studio Suite, ranging from 15m² to 35m². There are two F&B options for guests: Yum Cha, a contemporary Chinese restaurant, and Urban Park, a modern European restaurant and bar.

HONG KONG MOVIE TOUR

This new tour by Walk in Hong Kong runs for 180 minutes at 14.30 on weekends, taking movie buffs of Hong Kong films to nine sites near Sheung Wan and Mid-levels like Hollywood Road, Wing Lei Street and Man Mo Temple. The tour traces the footprint and memories of stars and interesting stories when popular local movies were filmed at these locations. The tour is conducted in Mandarin, with Cantonese and English is available upon request.

HOT THEMES



From left: Spend a day easily at Ocean Park; Kowloon Shangri-La, Hong Kong pioneers a cultural tour that introduces guest to the soul of Tsim Sha Tsui East; explore the MacLehose Trail



FAMILY FUN

Hong Kong is an ideal destination for family travel as it offers different activities and attractions to cater to every family member. Attractions range from exciting theme park visits, like Ocean Park, to educational museums or outdoor activities. Food options vary from high to low pricing, from three-star Michelin Chinese restaurants to Michelin-starred street food. Hong Kong is also a shopping paradise and young and old can expect to have a fun time.

CULTURE CONNECTION

As a cosmopolitan city, one thing which makes Hong Kong stand out is the contrast of east meets west. There are authentic cultural festivals, which will surprise tourists on how the cultural traditions are well-preserved and celebrated in the destination. To truly experience the living culture, tourists can join a series of experience Hong Kong tours that reveal local foodie secrets or show the visitor what cultural artefacts exist in different neighbourhoods.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

Outlying islands, quaint villages, sandy beaches and undulating mountain paths characterise the diversity of Hong Kong. About three quarters of Hong Kong is countryside. There are four long-distance hiking trails very popular among hikers. For instance, the MacLehose Trail (100km) traverses the New Territories from Sai Kung in the east to Tuen Mun in the west, while the Lantau Trail (70km) is a circular trail on Lantau Island.



CORDIS HONG KONG AT LANGHAM PLACE

555 Shanghai Street, Mongkok, Kowloon, Hong Kong



HARBOUR GRAND
KOWLOON

HARBOUR GRAND KOWLOON

20 Tak Fung Street, Whampoa Garden, Hungghom, Kowloon Hong Kong



BIG BUS HONG KONG



OCEAN PARK HONG KONG

Ocean Park, Aberdeen, Hong Kong



Hong Kong is home to some of the best attractions, hotels, and a wide range of activities for families and professionals. We are always expanding the variety of products in TAcenre so that your guests' every need can be served. Our system not only offers excellent hotels or theme parks, but also ferry tickets, SIM cards and even buffet meal packages! TAcenre makes sure you never run out of travel options for your customers to return to Hong Kong!



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A series of positive moves to strengthen India's appeal as a tourist destination has been made, including extended e-visa facility and a restructuring of the national MICE bureau; Taj Mahal glitters even on a bright, sunny day

INDIA

By Rohit Kaul

According to the Ministry of Tourism, India recorded 4.9 million foreign visitor arrivals between January and July 2016, an increase of 10 per cent, compared to 4.5 million between January and July 2015.

In July 2016, there were 736,000 foreign visitor arrivals compared to 628,000 in July 2015. Among India's top 15 source markets, the percentage share for July 2016 showed Bangladesh (17.3 per cent) leading the way followed by the US (16.5 per cent), the UK (11.7 per cent), Malaysia (3.5 per cent), France (3.1 per cent), Sri Lanka (2.9 per cent), Canada (2.7 per cent), China (2.3 per cent), Germany (2.3 per cent), Japan (2.2 per cent), Australia (2.2 per cent), Nepal (two per cent), Oman (two per cent), the UAE (two per cent) and Pakistan (1.7 per cent).

In July 2016, India's top ports of entry for foreign visitors were Delhi Airport (26.2 per cent), Mumbai Airport (17 per cent), Chennai Airport (10.1 per cent), Haridaspur Land Check Post (9.8 per cent), Bengaluru Airport (7.3 per cent), Cochin Airport (5.1 per cent), Hyderabad Airport (five per cent), Kolkata Airport (4.2 per cent), Gede Rail (two per cent), Ahmadabad Airport (1.9 per cent), Trivandrum Airport (1.9 per cent), Tiruchirapalli Airport (1.6 per cent), Attari-Wagah Land Check Post (1.1 per cent), Amritsar Airport (one per cent) and Ghojadanga Land Check Post (0.7 per cent).

Foreign exchange earnings from tourism between January and July 2016 stood at US\$13 billion, an increase of 7.5 per cent, compared to the US\$12.1 billion that was recorded between January and July 2015.

KEY CONTACTS

MINISTRY OF TOURISM www.tourism.gov.in
INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF TOUR OPERATORS www.iato.in

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ★ The first meeting of the National Medical & Wellness Tourism Promotion Board was held under the chairmanship of tourism minister, Mahesh Sharma in January 2016. Three sub-committees were constituted to look into regulatory and accreditation issues and the marketing of the medical and wellness segment. This is expected to promote and position India as a competent and credible medical and wellness tourism destination.
- ★ To enhance the visitor experience for visitors, especially international tourists, India's Ministry of Tourism launched the 24/7 toll-free Tourist Infoline 1800-111-363 in February 2016. It is available in 12 languages including English, Arabic, French, Korean, Mandarin and Spanish. Besides offering information relating to travel and tourism in India, service officers will assist the caller with advice on action to be taken during an emergency.
- ★ The Indian government extended its e-tourist visa facility to citizens of 37 more countries in February 2016, taking the tally to 150 countries. The additions now include countries such as Austria, Switzerland and South Africa. The scheme debuted in November 2014 to simplify India's visa regime.
- ★ In May 2016, India's Ministry of Tourism announced the restructuring of the India Convention Promotion Bureau. It will now be responsible to bid for international associations events and help boost international MICE visitors to the country.
- ★ The first Incredible India Tourism Investment Summit was organised by India's Ministry of Tourism in September 2016. The aim of the event was to attract much needed investment in infrastructure projects including hotels and theme parks across the country. Prior to the summit roadshows were conducted in the US, the UAE, China and Thailand to showcase investment opportunities.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

10.0

/ The percentage increase in foreign visitor arrivals between January and March 2016, with 2.6 million tourist, compared to 2.3 million recorded between January and March 2015.



13

/ The amount, in billions of US dollars, India made in foreign exchange earnings from tourism between January and July 2016, an increase of 7.5 per cent over the same period in 2015.

218.9

/ The percentage increase in the number of visitors who arrived in India on an e-tourist visa in July 2016. A total of 68,487 travellers used the facility compared to 21,476 a year ago.



17

/ The number of Chinese travel agents who participated in a fam trip to West Bengal in January 2016, at the invite of the West Bengal Tourism board which is eager to boost arrivals from China.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“The prospects of inbound tourism in India are positive for 2017, but the government needs to make the current e-tourist visa system robust. The application window for applying for an e-tourist visa should be extended from the existing 30 days to a period of about 180 days to make most of the facility.”

Subhash Goyal, Chairman, STIC Travel Group

“In 2017 we are expecting increased interest in new destinations like Himachal in the north, Sikkim in the east and Udaipur in Rajasthan, plus stronger movement towards the many UNESCO World Heritage Sites India has to offer.”

Richa Goyal Sikri, director – group business development, STIC Travel Group

“Prospects for 2017 do not look bright unless India’s Ministry of Tourism comes up with a focused marketing strategy in key source markets. Global economic uncertainty has slowed down the movement of leisure tourism.”

Arun Anand, managing director, Midtown Travels



“My wish for the coming year is to have good tourist inflows to India. Prospects are good despite the economic condition in Europe, and it will continue to be the (bigger) source market for international arrivals (to India). In addition, a number of countries including those in the Gulf are showing interest in India, particularly for medical tourism.”

EM Najeeb, managing director, Airtravel Enterprises India



From left: Join in the celebration of light in the Hindu festival of Diwali; witness the energy of the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland



FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Feb 6 - 8, 2017

**DHAULI
KALINGA
MAHOTSAV**

Also known as the National Festival of Martial Dance, this is celebrated in Odisha to mark the victory of peace over war. Festivities include dances and martial arts demonstrations.

Oct 19, 2017

DIWALI

Also known as Deepavali, it is the Hindu festival of lights and it celebrates the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana, or good over evil. Revellers light fire crackers and exchange sweets with loved ones.

Dec 1 - 7, 2017

**HORNBILL
FESTIVAL**

This lively event promotes the cultural heritage of India’s north-eastern state of Nagaland with celebrations that include exciting tribal dance performances and food fairs.

WHAT'S NEW

IBIS STYLES GOA CALANGUTE

Located a short walk from the popular Tivai Beach and minutes away from North Goa's famed Calangute and Candolim beaches is the brand new 197-room Ibis Styles Goa Calangute. The hotel is the first Ibis Styles in India, offering leisure and corporate guests a perfect beach stay experience. It is in close proximity to North Goa's popular entertainment and nightlife districts. The hotel is deeply influenced by its Portuguese heritage and charm which have been infused with a contemporary twist. Its surroundings reverberate Goa's relaxed beach atmosphere with inspiring local art and design that are embellished throughout in the walls and décor. The unique sea design theme is highlighted throughout the hotel lobby.

THE GATEWAY RESORT PUSHKAR BYPASS AJMER

Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces has announced the opening of The Gateway Resort Pushkar Bypass Ajmer. The 81-room and suite resort hotel is built in the Rajasthani royal style, complete with beautiful gardens, and offers a tranquil oasis for leisure and business travellers in the heart of the Aravalli Mountains to the north of the city. The hotel's architecture and design are inspired by the culture and history of Rajasthan. Its regal design in typical Rajasthani pink sandstone features private balconies with sand *jhoolas* (swings) in every room.

Inside, Bani Thani art – the local style that has its origins in nearby Kishangarh – provides a window into the area's cultural past while live performances of Langa folk singers bring Rajasthan to life for guests.

ROSEATE HOUSE NEW DELHI

Roseate House New Delhi, located in the hospitality district of Aerocity, is the latest addition to the brand's luxury portfolio designed to cater to the next generation of savvy business and leisure travellers. The hotel features 216 spacious and well-appointed rooms with 15 suites, including three elite private suites that can be combined, allowing guest an ultimate experience in luxury. Roseate House New Delhi is spread across 6,475m², is a 30-minute drive to the historical capital of New Delhi and corporate hub of Gurgaon and just 10 minutes away from Indira Gandhi International Airport.

LA ITALIA

Park Inn Jaipur has introduced new Italian restaurant La Italia to its F&B offerings. The rooftop restaurant offers authentic Italian food with a twist under the sky, along with an indoor dining experience with soothing Italian music. Adding to a sumptuous meal is an exciting selection of international wines and beverages from Italy. La Italia's menu offers an exciting mix of colourful and delicious salads, freshly baked breads, thin crust pizzas prepared in an open wood fired oven and handmade pasta made from the finest quality produce. The range of desserts includes the popular favourites tiramisu and panacotta.



From top: The Gateway Hotel Pushkar Bypass Ajmer; Roseate House

HOT THEMES



From left: Take off to Imagica for days of fun rides and performances; paraglide around the hill station of Naukuchiatal in Uttarakhand; luxuriate in the private embrace of Samode Safari Lodge

FAMILY FUN

One of the newest and biggest draws in India for families is the massive Imagica entertainment park, located on Mumbai Pune Expressway. It offers a gamut of interesting experiences all under one roof and across three zones – a theme park, a water park and a snow park. There are also plenty of restaurants to keep visitors full and energised.

For the convenience of guests who wish to spend more than just a day to fully explore all three zones, Imagica offers the five-star Hotel Novotel Imagica Khopoli. The hotel houses 287 rooms, four F&B outlets and large banqueting spaces.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

The north Indian state of Uttarakhand is blessed with abundant natural beauty. The state offers activities ranging from rafting to mountaineering.

Paragliding is one activity that tourists should experience at the small hill station of Naukuchiatal. Besides the adrenaline rush the activity offers, there is a good opportunity for one to soak in the calmness and serenity of this hill station.

A number of companies, such as Eagle Eye Adventure, operate in the region and offer an exciting way to discover nature and have a memorable adventure.

ROMANTIC MOMENTS

The Samode Safari Lodge at the Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh is an extravagant wilderness experience cradled in luxury and unusual sophistication. The lodge was even named one of the 10 best safaris in 2015 by *CNN.com*.

There are 12 private villas, each offering a spacious lounge, a bedroom with a modern en-suite bath and a dressing area, a unique open-air bath court, and a private verandah with striking views of nature.

The main lodge houses a lounge with fireplaces, a pool room, a library, a heated open air swimming pool, a spa and more.



OAKWOOD PREMIER PRESTIGE BANGALORE

24, Vittal Mallya Road, UB City, Bangalore, India



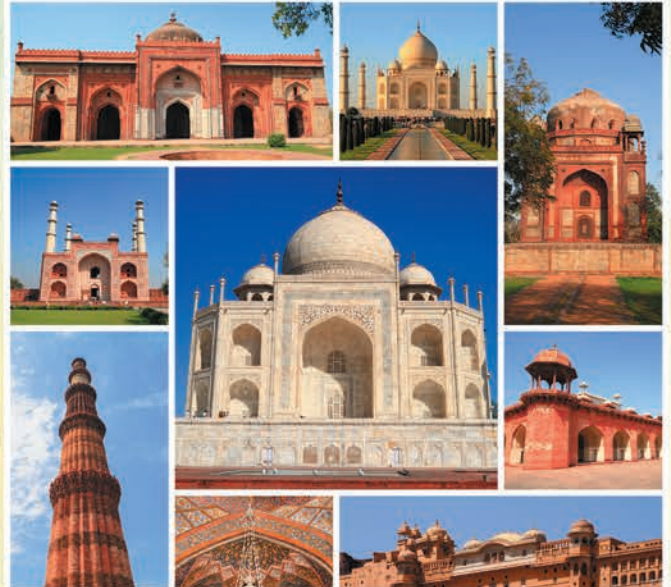
THE OBEROI MUMBAI

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Road, Nariman Point, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400021, India



THE ROYAL PLAZA DELHI

19, Ashoka Road, New Delhi 110001, India



HALF DAY TAJ MAHAL AND AGRA FORT TOUR

Agra, India



FULL DAY MAHABALIPURAM TOUR

Chennai, India

India is one of the most unique and diverse destinations in the world. From the mountains and hills in Kashmir and Himachal to the backwaters in Kerala, each state offers a completely unique experience. At TAcetre, we bring you detailed information that would help you figure out the best hotels in terms of not only the facilities and rooms but very importantly, location, which will help you give the best advise to your clients visiting India. India is also emerging as a great holiday experience not only for the standard leisure trips but for Yoga, Holistic Tours, MICE, honeymoons, shopping trips, and golf!



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Indonesia is on track to achieve its 12 million targeted footfalls for 2016; Jakarta's city skyline pictured here

INDONESIA

By Mimi Hudoyo

Indonesia is targeting to achieve visitor arrivals of 12 million this year and the destination has managed to attract 7.4 million in the first eight months of 2016.

Arief Yahya, minister of tourism, had described the country's tourism performance to be "according to our target" and "on track".

Visitor arrivals in July and August were 1,032,741 and 1,031,986 respectively, and the good performance is expected to continue until the end of 2016 towards the 12 million mark.

The government's efforts to grow visitor numbers with a visa-free policy to 169 countries coupled with branding, advertising and selling strategies have resulted in strong growth in some markets.

Those that recorded the highest growth between January and August 2016 were Egypt with 49.9 per cent, Bahrain 46.3 per cent, India 29.2 per cent, France 23.8 per cent and China 23.7 per cent.

Moving forward the Ministry of Tourism will put more focus on digital marketing and sales, and it has been working closely with online businesses like TripAdvisor, Google, Baidu and Ctrip to net travellers who are digital-savvy.

Noting that trends are showing that travellers seek information, make product comparisons, book trips and share travel information on digital media, Arief Yahya said the online approach "is the way for us (to boost travel)".

The ministry has also come up with an online marketplace, where industry players can upload their products and packages.

KEY CONTACTS

MINISTRY OF TOURISM www.kemepar.go.id

ASSOCIATION OF THE INDONESIAN TOUR AND TRAVEL AGENCIES
www.asitaindonesia.org

INDONESIAN HOTEL AND RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION
www.phrionline.com

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ✦ In June 2016, the European Commission lifted the safety blacklisting of Indonesian carriers Lion Air, Batik Air and Citilink. With this development, seven of the 65 airline companies in Indonesia are now allowed entry into EU countries. They are Garuda Indonesia, Airfast Indonesia, Premiair, Indonesia AirAsia plus the three above. This means more opportunity for these airlines, whose primary network is within Indonesia, to fly travellers from Europe domestically. In the past, travellers had limited choice because insurance did not cover flights on blacklisted carriers.
- ✦ The US Federal Aviation Administration upgraded Garuda Indonesia's status to Category One on August 16 after its audit showed the airline complied with the ICAO safety standard. As a result, the airline is planning to fly to the US next year, using the Boeing 777-300ER via Tokyo. Los Angeles and New York are possible destinations.
- ✦ Indonesia's tourism authority is launching ITX – Indonesia Travel X-change, an online platform and digital marketplace for suppliers and consumers. Travel-related suppliers from around the country can upload their products on the platform, which is supported with a booking system and payment gateway. ITX is the government's way of supporting small and medium enterprises to go digital and reach out to international customers.
- ✦ Indonesia is developing a programme focusing on 10 destinations in Indonesia called *10 New Bali*. It is named so as it expects the performance of these destinations to be as strong as Bali. The 10 destinations are Lake Toba (North Sumatera), Belitung, Tanjung Lesung (Banten), Kepulauan Seribu (Thousand Island, Jakarta), Borobudur Temple area (Jogjakarta, Solo, Semarang), Mt Bromo (East Java), Mandalika Lombok (West Nusa Tenggara), Komodo (East Nusa Tenggara), Wakatobi National Park (South-east Sulawesi), and Morotai (North Maluku). Major developments, which include attractions, accessibility and infrastructure as well as management systems are being planned in these areas.
- ✦ In a bid to develop community-based tourism, the Ministry of Tourism is aiming to build 100,000 homestays across the country by 2019. The government has signed an agreement with the Financial Services Authority whereby the financial institution will provide long-term loans of 20 years, with a one per cent down payment and the interest rate for the homestay owner is at five per cent and seven per cent for the government. At press time, a design competition for the homestays, which has to be of Indonesian design, was under way.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

15

/ The number, in millions, of visitor arrivals the Ministry of Tourism is targeting for 2017. This is 25 per cent higher than the 2016 target. At press time, the ministry has proposed a budget of eight million rupiah (US\$615.4 million) for 2017 tourism programmes.



40



/ In percentage, the budget the Ministry of Tourism will allocate for supporting industry partners in selling Indonesian products. Branding and advertising will receive an allocation of 30 per cent each in 2017.

3,000

/ The number of familiarisation trips inviting industry members to Indonesia in 2017.

Familiarisation trips are an important part of the Ministry's efforts to introduce new destinations to tour operators, the media and travel bloggers. The government is focusing on the development of the 10 New Bali, new and revitalised destinations.



265



/ The number, in millions, of domestic travellers targeted in 2017. In 2015, the number was 255.05 million, while the target for 2016 is 260 million.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“Indonesia seems to be well positioned in 2017 for a further increase in arrivals, given the stable growth of nearly every sizable market like Australia, China, India and Europe. Upgraded infrastructure over the past few years, coupled with the expectation of further developments, gives us confidence in sustainable growth. However, having achieved a strong position in arrivals,

Indonesia should start tapping more markets with higher yield as opposed to markets with large growth potential. This would minimise the environmental impact while optimising opportunities, especially in the less developed and fascinating areas.”

Umberto Cadamuro, COO, inbound, PACTO

“Indonesia welcomes the world with free visa-on-arrival for 169 countries. Plus, with new airports and seaports being built and upgraded this year, and cruise ship regulations being streamlined, 2017 looks very promising for Indonesia.”

Anna Lee, director – contracting, marketing & operations, Asiatravel.com Holdings



“Significant growth in most European markets in 2016 should continue into 2017 despite problems such as Brexit, the refugee situation, etc. The same is expected for other traditional markets such as the US and Canada. We will see more arrivals from Latin America due to better flight connections in 2017. East Asian arrivals will recover and China will remain the top source market, especially to Bali. While the overall outlook for 2017 is very positive, there will be challenges as more new digital business are pushing traditional players into a corner.”

Siggi Neuhaus, general manager, Caraka Travelindo Tour & Travel, Makassar



From left: Sanur Village Festival, Bali Arts Festival



FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Jun - Jul, 2017

BALI ARTS FESTIVAL

Held at Taman Werdhi Budaya Arts Centre in Denpasar, Bali, the annual Bali Arts Festival spotlights Balinese performing arts and culture while also showcasing works from other parts of the country.

Aug 2017

JEMBER FASHION CARNAVAL

The annual Jember Fashion Carnival, held in Jember city, East Java, is celebrated with a flamboyant parade of dancers in extravagant costumes that feature traditional Indonesian motifs.

August 2017

SANUR VILLAGE FESTIVAL

Sanur Village Festival brings the community together over food, arts, sports, and environmentally friendly activities. Food bazaars, special tours and games are part of the programme.

WHAT'S NEW

SPICE BY CHRIS SALANS SANUR, BALI

Spice by Chris Salans opened its second outlet in September in Sanur. Like the original Spice in Ubud, it is helmed by chef Chris Salans, founder and chef of the famous Mozaic Restaurant Gastronomique. The menu is affordable and features dishes made with Indonesian ingredients and using French cooking techniques. This approach has become an influential movement, propelling Salans to celebrity status in South-east Asia and beyond. At Spice, all ingredients are locally sourced, with an emphasis on the surprising flavours and healing properties of Indonesia's aromatic roots, herbs and spices. The restaurant seats 80 people, including 40 outdoor garden seats and 40 seats in the air-conditioned interior.

ROYAL TULIP SARANAN RESORT & SPA, BALI

The Royal Tulip Saranan Resort & Spa is a new upscale retreat in Central Bali. Located on a 3.2ha site in Baturiti and offering 89 rooms and villas, the property has two ballrooms for up to 1,000 guests and three breakout rooms. It is surrounded by paddy fields and organic gardens which are being cultivated by local farmers. The produce are for the hotel's use. With expansive spa and wellness facilities, the resort positions itself as a retreat centre and also offers activities like trekking and cycling in the surrounding area.

FOUR SEASONS JAKARTA

The new Four Seasons Jakarta opened on June 28, adding another luxury property in the Indonesian

capital. The 125-key all-suite accommodation is well located within the city's Central Business District. Facilities include four F&B outlets, a spa, a 24-hour fitness centre, an outdoor pool on the fifth floor rooftop, and more than 1,800m² of flexible function space. Soon to open are the Presidential Suite, the Ambassador Suite, Alto Restaurant and Bar, and a woman's beauty salon.

THE WESTIN JAKARTA

The highest hotel in Indonesia opened in Jakarta in September 2016, occupying floors 50 to 69 of the new mix-use Gama Tower in the Kuningan CBD. The Westin Jakarta has 272 rooms, each offering uninterrupted views of the city's skyscrapers and residential areas. The hotel opens with three F&B outlets, while the Henshin, the restaurant featuring Nikkei Cuisine with Japanese-Peruvian flavours, will open in late-2016 on the top three floors of the building. The hotel has 3,000m² of function rooms on the ground and first floor of the building. Another function room will open in late-2016 on top of the building, making it the highest banquet area in the country with capacity for up to 200 guests.

RADISSON GOLF & CONVENTION CENTER BATAM

Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group debuted Radisson Golf & Convention Center Batam in October 2016. It is the island's first international hotel with both a substantial convention facility and golf course. On offer now are 240 rooms and suites, a grand ballroom for up to 1,800 guests, seven meeting rooms, a large outdoor pool, an indoor pool, a fitness centre, a Kid's Club, a spa and 152-seat Bite all-day-dining restaurant. More dining options will open soon.



From top: Four Seasons Jakarta, The Westin Jakarta ballroom

HOT THEMES



From left: xxx



GOURMET LURES

Indonesia has a great variety of culinary delights where each destination in the various regions has unique and specific food options that travellers can try. Jakarta, as a melting pot of Indonesian culture and people, does not only have its own traditional food like Soto Betawi, or Jakarta beef soup, served at Soto Betawi H Ma'ruf in Menteng. There is also street food like Asinan Betawi, or a fruit and vegetable salad, which can be found along Jalan Cikini 4. Travellers can also enjoy traditional Indonesian food from other areas.

FAMILY FUN

Family travel is big business in Indonesia as most Indonesians like to travel with their family members. Facilities catering to their needs are growing in line with the growth of the domestic market. Some of these facilities, are suitable for international travellers. In Jogjakarta, Omah Kecebong, which means Tadpole House in Javanese, offers a traditional guest house experience and showcases local culture, food, horticulture lessons, touring the village on an ox cart and playing traditional games.

ROMANTIC MOMENTS

A new luxury resort that has emerged during ongoing developments in Bintan, about 75 minutes by ferry from Singapore, has elevated the destination's status as a romantic destination for weddings and honeymoons. The Sanchaya offers guests the ultimate privacy with only 30 spacious suites spread across five hectares of beachfront land and private access to a white, sandy beach. Barely two years old, the property has already won the hearts of Middle Eastern royal families and international celebrities.



Wapa di Ume
a very different resort & spa

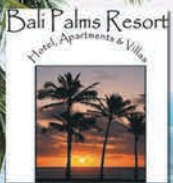
WAPA DI UME RESORT AND SPA

Jl. Suweta, Banjar Bentuyung, Ubud, Gianyar, Kabupaten Gianyar, Bali 80571, Indonesia



HOTEL OMBAK SUNSET

Gili Trawangan, West Nusa Tenggara Indonesia



BALI PALMS RESORT

Jl. Raya Candidasa, Amlapura, Manggis, Kabupaten Karangasem, Bali 80813, Indonesia



KUTA CENTRAL PARK HOTEL BALI

Jalan Patih Jelantik, Kuta, Badung, Bali 80361, Indonesia



KOMANEKA
at Rasa Sayang

KOMANEKA AT RASA SAYANG

Jalan Monkey Forest, Ubud, Bali 80571, Indonesia

Indonesia welcomed more than 9 million tourists annually over the past 3 years. This shows that Indonesia is still one of the leading destinations for travellers around the world. Aside from Bali, destinations such as Yogyakarta, Lombok, and Bandung, to name a few, has seen an increase in tourist arrivals. At TAcetre, we make sure that we have diverse options of travel products for you to offer your guests. TAcetre offers more than 3000 hotels in Indonesia as well as more than 32,000 package bundles!



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Japan is bustling with an inbound tourism boom; the famous Shibuya crossing pictured here

JAPAN

By Kathryn Wortley

Inbound tourism in Japan has seen exponential growth in recent years. Tourist arrivals hit 17.9 million in 2015, a 47.3 per cent increase on 2014, prompting the Japanese government in March 2016 to raise its target from 20 million footfalls by 2020 to 40 million.

The stellar growth continued into 2016, with a 26.7 per cent increase in tourist arrivals in the January to July period of this year, surging way ahead of the modest global arrivals growth of five per cent over the same period.

Mamoru Kobori, executive vice president of the Japan National Tourism Organisation, noted that “inbound tourist numbers have increased remarkably since the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, with every year since then showing record-breaking growth”.

The tourism boom has been attributed to the relaxation of visa rules for Asian nationals, depreciation of the Japanese yen, and improved flight options, including those offered by low-cost carriers.

Data from the Ministry of Finance shows that inbound tourists to Japan outspent Japanese travellers overseas by 905 billion Japanese yen (US\$8.7 billion) between January and October 2015, marking Japan’s first surplus in travel spend in the past 20 years.

KEY CONTACTS

JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION: www.jnto.go.jp

JAPAN HOTEL ASSOCIATION: www.j-hotel.or.jp/en/

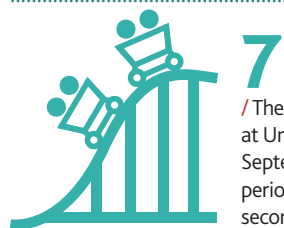
5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ✦ The Japanese government is driving 10 objectives to revamp Japan’s tourism, which include a focus on aesthetics. State guest houses in Kyoto and Tokyo will be opened to visitors, national parks will undergo remodelling to provide more interactive experiences, and the landscapes of major sightseeing spots will be enhanced.
- ✦ The Japanese government has set new rules to allow hotels to expand their floor area ratios by up to 50 per cent, according to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. With hotel occupancy in Tokyo standing at a high 83.7 per cent in 2015, this move might just be the catalyst for tourism growth in 2017.
- ✦ More assistance for overseas tourists in Japan is now available. Nankai Electric Railway Co. has opened a ticket information counter at Kansai International Airport, exclusively to provide inbound tourists with information on travel destinations, access, transfers and tickets in English and Mandarin.
- ✦ The Hokkaido Shinkansen service made its debut in March 2016, linking JR Tokyo station with JR Shin-Hakodate-Hokuto station on Japan’s most northerly island in four hours, 10 times a day. Overseas visitors with a Japan Rail Pass now have an easier and quicker way to get to the vast Hokkaido region, which had been viewed as being too inaccessible unless visiting Japan on a long vacation.
- ✦ Arrivals into Japan are spreading out to more regions, as a greater number of tourists are exploring deeper into the country, according to the Japan Tourism Agency. This has spurred the development of more traditional inns, called ryokans, and they are expected to mushroom in more destinations, as tourists venture beyond the Golden Route of Tokyo, Kyoto and Hiroshima.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

40,000,000

/ The number of overseas tourists that Japan aims to welcome annually by 2020.



7

/ The number in millions of visitors welcomed at Universal Studios Japan in Osaka in the April-September period, up 500,000 from the same period last year and setting a new record for the second consecutive year.

90



/ The number of visitors in fiscal year 2015, from April 2015 to June 2016, was 90 per cent that of the number of visitors in fiscal 2010, before the Great East Japan earthquake in 2011.



582,500

/ The number of Chinese tourists who visited Japan in June 2016, making China the top source market for the country that month.

500,000

/ The number of takeoff and landing slots at Narita International Airport should the proposal for a third runway be approved. The airport now has 300,00 slots.



PROJECTIONS FOR 2017

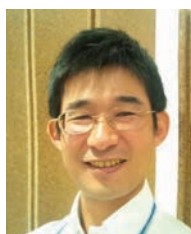


“This August we welcomed 20 per cent more travellers than we did last year, and we foresee continued growth in 2017. Starting from 2017, we will improve Japan’s MICE appeal by offering larger facilities and opening cultural sites to iness event delegates to allow them to experience Japan’s uniqueness.”

Etsuko Kawasaki, executive director, Japan Convention Bureau

“Inbound numbers will continue to see growth into 2017 and beyond. The country’s geographic diversity will ensure that many first-timers will be inspired to become repeat visitors and explore the regions. The challenge will be the limited accommodation outside the major cities.”

Paul Christie, CEO, Walk Japan



“I’m projecting inbound numbers in 2017 to grow by) around 10 per cent – a moderate increment compared to 2016 (19.0 per cent in forecast). The slowdown will be mostly due to the appreciation of the yen, which will bring down average spending. The average daily rate in large cities will decrease slightly, but some local cities will see significant rise.”

Hiroshi Kurosu, executive officer/chief researcher, JTB Tourism Research & Consulting

“Japan’s inbound performance will be much higher in 2017. Japan’s total arrivals from January to September was 17.97 million, with JTB contributing 2.43 million travellers. More than 70 per cent of arrivals are from Asian. Due to the safety and diverse beauty of Japan, as well as easy visa processes and strong air seat capacity, Asian markets will continue to do exceptionally well.”

Pokharel Madhu, director of sales & marketing, South-east Asia & India, JTB Global Marketing & Travel Inc



The 1,000-year-old Soma-Namaoi festival celebrates Fukushima Prefecture’s samurai heritage

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Jan 3, 2017
TAMASESERI

One of the three main festivals of Kyushu, Tamaseseri is celebrated at Hakozaki Shrine by teams of farmers and fishermen battling each other to hand a 8kg “treasure” ball to a Shinto priest to determine whether the New Year will bring a rich harvest or a large catch.

Feb 15, 2017
TAKEUCHI

The winter festival of Takeuchi sees two teams, representing the north and south of Rokugo, Akita, hitting each other with long bamboo poles while praying for a good rice harvest. A north victory indicates a good rice harvest, but should the south win, the price of rice will go up.

Jul 29-31, 2017
SOMA-NOMAOI

An intangible folk cultural asset of Japan, this 1,000-year-old festival unique to Fukushima Prefecture recreates a number of battle scenes involving samurai horsemen. Other events worth catching include traditional rituals and lively processions.



WHAT'S NEW

SUNSHINE CITY PRINCE HOTEL

Sunshine City Prince Hotel in Tokyo has teamed up with kimono rental specialist Vasara Asakusa to offer a *yukata* (light kimono) dressing experience for guests. The package includes rental of a *yukata* and accessories, assistance from a *yukata* dresser, and hair and make-up services. The *yukata* can be worn throughout the stay. All the items are also available for purchase.

GRAND HYATT TOKYO

The Grand Hyatt Tokyo has refreshed its event venues which now feature a cosy, residential feel, direct access to the property's outdoor garden as well as the latest in event technology such as SiliconCore's high-resolution LED display screens. The works have also given Thyme banquet room a new show kitchen.

REDHORSE OSAKA WHEEL

Towering over 120m high, the new Redhorse Osaka Wheel is the tallest Ferris wheel in Japan and the fifth tallest in the world. It has 72 glass-bottomed gondolas complete with heating and air conditioning, some of which are VIP units that are outfitted in luxury. Each rotation takes 18 minutes. The ride costs 1,000 yen (US\$9.60) per person.

PARK HOTEL TOKYO

The Park Hotel Tokyo has transformed more

than 20 rooms into themed works of art through its *Artists in Hotel* project, designed to encapsulate the creator's passion and view of the world. Several prestigious and talented Japanese artists have joined in the project to create rooms bearing themes that range from the traditional, such as Samurai, Wabi-Sabi, Geisha Goldfish and Festival, to the modern, including Lucky Cat, Public Bath, and Zodiac.

SYARIAH HOTEL FUJISAN

A vacant house near Lake Kawaguchi, a renowned scenic site at the foot of Mount Fuji, has been renovated and reopened as a hotel catering to Muslim travellers. Features of the Syariah Hotel Fujisan include a prayer room with prayer mats, guestrooms with arrows pointing to Mecca, and a halal menu. The hotel also offers bicycle hire.

KUMANO WAYFARER

Kyushu-based tour operator Walk Japan has launched a self-guided walking tour along the ancient Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route, one of only two in the world with UNESCO World Heritage status. The 7D6N self-guided Kumano Wayfarer tour begins from Kyoto's Nakahechi trail, taking participants on a hilly, winding path through forests to get to the sacred Kumano Sanzan shrines. Participants will also pass oji sub-shrines, carved deities and local villages, with opportunities to catch scenic views of tea fields and the Pacific Ocean along the way. Accommodation will mostly be in family-run inns, with a resort stay rounding up the tour.



From top: Yukata experience at Sunshine City Prince Hotel; Redhorse Osaka Wheel; artistic rooms in Park Hotel Tokyo

HOT THEMES



From left: Fun for all ages at Edo Wonderland Nikko Edomura; diving in Okinawa's crystal-clear waters; hot springs in Beppu, Kyushu Prefecture

FAMILY FUN

Family-friendly Japan has no shortage of theme parks. Just a few hours north of Tokyo, Edo Wonderland Nikko Edomura offers families the chance to step back in time into the Edo Period (1603-1868). From the houses and shops to the watch tower and bridge, the 500,000m² theme park gives insight into what life was like. Children will love being trained as a samurai, ninja or police officer, while everyone in the family can try their hands at traditional indigo dyeing or dress up as a ninja, samurai, princess or geisha.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

Nature appeals are in abundance in Japan, some great for simple strolls while others tantalise the more adventurous. Okinawa is ideal for underwater adventures like scuba and snorkelling. Its crystal-clear waters and warm temperatures attract many divers who are drawn to the marine life and underwater remains from World War II. Closer to Tokyo, scuba enthusiast can take a 25-hour boat ride to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ogasawara Islands where untouched coral reefs are.

ROMANTIC MOMENTS

Japan has a multitude of scenic *onsen* (hot spring) town where there are charming ryokans, some offering guestrooms with private *onsen* and scenic views. Beppu in Kyushu Prefecture is one such destination that presents opportunities for couples to revitalise their shells and spark romantic moments. For a memorable experience, try Takefue Onsen which sits in a bamboo grove in Kumamoto Prefecture. A special anniversary package offers a complimentary bottle of Champagne and refreshments.



HOTEL MONTEREY EDELHOF SAPPORO Nishi 1-1, Kita 2 Jyo, Chuo-ku, Sapporo -Hokkaido, Japan 060-0002



OSAKA MARRIOTT MIYAKO HOTEL 1-1-43 Abeno-suji, Abeno-ku Osaka 545-0052 Japan



SAMURAI SCHOOL: SAMURAI FOR A DAY CLASS Kyoto, Japan



FULL DAY TOUR: MEIJI SHRINE, ASAKUSA TEMPLE, TOKYO BAY Tokyo, Japan

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Macau is shifting away from its gaming destination reputation and playing up its family-friendly attractions and tourism options; Studio City Macao pictured here

MACAU

By Prudence Lui

A total of 17.56 million people visited Macau in the first seven months of 2016, up 0.9 per cent year-on-year. The performance of overnight visitors was much better, up 8.9 per cent to 8.61 million, while hotel overnight guests recorded a jump of 12.7 per cent with a total of 6.48 million visitors. In addition, the average length of stay increased by 0.2 days year-on-year to 1.2 days, while the average stay of overnight visitors also rose by 0.2 day to 2.2 days.

Macau is keeping its fingers crossed that the destination will register slight increases by year-end, boosted by factors such as the introduction of new routes and more flights to more destinations, namely Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and mainland China, mega destination promotions in Japan and South Korea and the leveraging of online platforms to promote Macau events and mega-events lined-up in 2H2016.

Macau Government Tourism Office director, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, said, "With the list of events lined-up for the second-half of the year along with the opening of new integrated resorts, the increase of flights frequency to South Korea and Japan and our joint promotional efforts with tourism stakeholders, we are confident that arrivals will continue to bounce back and, more importantly, visitors tend to stay longer."

KEY CONTACTS

MACAU TRAVEL AGENCY ASSOCIATION myt@macau.ctm.net
TRAVEL INDUSTRY COUNCIL OF MACAU andykkwu@yahoo.com.hk
MACAU HOTEL ASSOCIATION www.macauhotel.org

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ✦ The Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), Cultural Affairs Bureau and Sports Bureau are working more closely to create mega-events. The Wushu Masters Challenge was introduced in August as a new event and offered wushu demonstrations, a forum and other activities.
- ✦ The kick-off of the Macao Galaxy Entertainment International Marathon, Parade through Macao, Latin City and Macao Light Festival will be arranged on the same day for tourists to experience the multiple facets of the destination.
- ✦ New resorts and hotels are adding to the dazzle in Cotai. This year, the Wynn Palace and the Parisian Macao are offering new hotel rooms and enriching non-gaming elements. Attractions such as a half-scale replica of the Eiffel Tower and a performance lake are expected to attract tourists to visit and stay longer.
- ✦ More flights have been inaugurated to different source markets, including Fukuoka and Moscow. Existing and new airlines are now operating more flights to destinations such as Seoul. These developments are expected to bring in more international tourists.
- ✦ Positive trends have been recorded in Macau's monthly tourist arrivals. Year-on-year growth has been recorded for 12 consecutive months since August 2015. MGTO is continuing destination promotion efforts in different markets and working on initiatives to extend visitor's length of stay.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

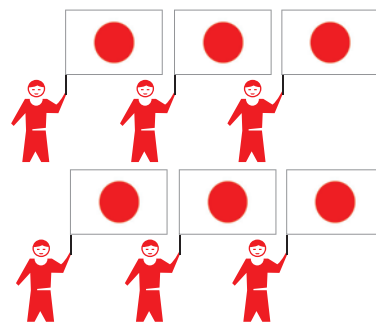
10.3

/ The percentage growth in arrivals from South Korea in the first seven months of the year to 364,640. The market has bounced back after MERS and the positive trend is set to continue as the frequency of Macau-Seoul flights have increased, after T'Way Airlines resumed flights between the two cities in July.



7.4

/ The percentage increase in arrivals from Japan in the first seven months of the year. The good showing is a result of Air Macau launching flights to Fukuoka in March. At press time, frequency was set to be increased by end of October.



600,000

/ The number of passenger movements posted in July 2016, a record for the Macau International Airport's 21-year history due to a surge in new air services such as JSC Royal Flight, from Moscow, and Lion Air from Manado.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“Inbound tourism will rise in 2017 especially with the emergence of new hotels, attractions and casinos. Macau is also rapidly (courting the) family (market), which highly complements the gaming market. Macau also has fantastic shows, cable cars and even one of the tallest bungee jumps in the world! There is a huge potential to develop and grow the inbound business to Macau.”

Lara Sayo, country manager – Hong Kong and Macau, [Asiatravel.com Holdings](#)

“Quite positive, since The Parisian Macao has opened to extremely good response. In fact, the performance of all Sands Resorts Cotai Strip Macao properties has been very encouraging and the summer was strong overall. This sentiment is expected to continue through 2017. Our FIT and wholesale business is performing well, while in terms of MICE, we are in a better place year-on-year.”

Ruth Boston, vice president of destination marketing & sales, [Sands China](#)

“To me 2016 was not a good year but the industry will improve in 2017, given more new hotels are lined up to open. Visitor arrivals have hit rock-bottom, but August saw positive growth. That's a good sign. With two to three new hotels being added to the market recently, it means better supply and hotel rates. (Furthermore, Macau is) drawing more family visitors with its diverse non-gaming offers.”

Eric Chang, executive director, [Air Cruise Travel](#)



“2017 will be a watershed year for Macau. It is the year (Macau will have) the whole Cotai developed, a bridge to Hong Kong, a new ferry terminal and an upgraded airport. Most of (the light railway) will also be ready and operating in 2017.”

Bruno Simões, executive director, [smallWORLD Experience](#)



Macau is awash in vibrant colours when Chinese New Year rolls in

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Jan 28-30, 2017
CHINESE NEW YEAR

Being one of the most important festivals for all Chinese, Macau will be celebrating the festival with a 238-metre-long golden dragon parade across major tourist spots and celebrations include fireworks and firecrackers displays, and many others. Tourists can soak up the festive atmosphere, join locals in worship at A-ma Temple, set off fireworks at designated zones and receive red packets, or *lai see*, for good fortune and blessings.

May, 2017
PROCESSION OF OUR LADY OF FÁTIMA

This Portuguese tradition from the early 20th century is still practised in Macau, a former Portuguese colony. The festival involves a procession of women dressed in white carrying the statue of the Virgin Mary, with other devotees, to commemorate the miracle of Fátima in Portugal in 1917. The procession starts from St Dominic's Church and ends at the Chapel of Our Lady of Penha, where an open-air mass will be said.

May 2, 2017
FEAST OF THE DRUNKEN DRAGON

Listed as a national intangible cultural heritage, the festival's signature dance is held in honour of a man emboldened by alcohol who destroys an evil dragon. Organised by fishermen associations, men perform the dance with the wooden head and tail of a dragon through the city. As they dance, they drink wine until they drop. Free rice boxes are also given to citizens to offer wishes of good luck and health.



©MGTO

From top: The Parisian Macao; Anim'Arte Nam Van

WHAT'S NEW

EFFEL TOWER

Erected in front of The Parisian Macao, this half-scale replica of the original features two observation decks which offer views of China, the Cotai Strip and the peninsula of Macau. While the 7/F deck gives ample space for visitors to hang around, the other one situated on the 37/F can only hold 90 and there is no time limit on the visit. The tower features a daily light show from 19.20 to midnight with music every 20 minutes.

THE PARISIAN MACAO

Making its debut on September 13, 2016, The 3,000-room Parisian represents the last piece of the jigsaw that completes American developer Sheldon Adelson's grand dream for Macau. Showcasing contemporary French flair, this latest integrated resort offers affordable luxury and various non-gaming facilities such as 170 luxury retail boutiques, 11 cafés and restaurants, a 1,200-seat The Parisian Theatre for international entertainment, Aqua World and Qube Kingdom.

WYNN PALACE

The 1,706-room Wynn Palace opened in August and is designed with a floral theme. In addition, it also features thousands of fine and decorative art displays. Key highlights include the 3.2 hectare Performance Lake, fountain show and air-conditioned Sky

Cabs that travel more than 27m above the Performance Lake. The property offers 18,580m² of luxury shopping, the city's largest spa with 22 treatment rooms and a collection of 12 F&B outlets including fine dining restaurants such as Wing Lei Palace, Andrea's and SW Steakhouse.

ANIM'ARTE NAM VAN

Launched in June, this new area at Nam Van Lake combines sports, arts and culture to keep visitors busy. There are creative shops to peruse, a weekend craft market to visit, weekend cultural performances and activities to partake in, and swan-shaped pedal boats to rent for a fun ride. And when a rest is required, head to the café run by the Institute for Tourism Studies.

PLANET J

Planet J marks the city's first theme park with a live-action-role-play theme. Located at Sands Cotai Central, it offers an indoor venue filled with action and fun for a group of up to 2,000 people. Designed with eight feature zones and over 200 game installations, the 9,300m² park and breaks free from traditional theme park concepts. Visitors become adventurers as they make use of an electronic Magic Scroll to connect themselves to all the games. Based on different levels of challenge, they are tasked with rescuing the magic kingdom using intelligence and skill. To enhance the experience, trendy sound effects, special lighting, and theatrical smoke and fog effects are deployed to enhance and stimulate the senses.

HOT THEMES



From top: Macao Science Centre's interactive displays will keep children busy; 8 1/2 Otto e Mezzo is one of the many Michelin-star restaurants in Macau; take a lovers' stroll to the Ruins of St. Paul

FAMILY FUN

With Macau's recent determination to reposition itself as a welcoming destination for families, new family friendly draws have emerged. Besides Anim'Arte Nam Van (see *What's new above*), the Nam Van Lakeside Plaza is a new attraction for families. It has been transformed into a leisure hub with a distinctive character, combining creativity, leisure, dining and performance.

Although not new, the Macao Science Centre, designed by renowned Chinese-American architect I M Pei, is a must see for its beauty and pleasant location. Children will enjoy its interactive displays and activities.

More fun can be found at the integrated resorts, from sophisticated and adventurous children's zones to world-class shows and entertaining family-friendly programmes.

GOURMET LURES

The stunning variety of distinctive cuisines available in Macau, from Michelin-star restaurants to street food stalls, makes this international city a veritable foodie paradise. Unique to Macau and a must-try for visitors is Macanese food which has over 450 years of history and uses a special combination of Portuguese and Chinese cooking style and ingredients.

Too dazzled by Macau's endless options? Pick up a copy of *Star Merchant Award Food and Eateries Guide* published by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO). The handy guide includes F&B establishments certified by MGTO under the Quality Tourism Services Accreditation Scheme. Or simply take a walk through any of the integrated resorts for a Michelin-star pick.

ROMANTIC MOMENTS

Couples can stroll around Macau with the *Step Out, Experience Macao's Communities - Walking Tour Routes* app or guidebook in hand. Among the eight walking tour routes suggested, one stands out for romantic moments. The Marriage of East and West in St Anthony's Parish, where visitors can experience the multicultural vicinity filled with charming Portuguese and Chinese buildings, and learn their enchanting stories. The popular Travessa da Paixão (Passion Lane) is close to the Ruins of St. Paul's.

Two other walking routes – *Bygone Days of Taipa Village* and *Nostalgia in Coloane* – are also appealing for couples, allowing them to embrace the tranquillity of old village life, see the historic buildings and enjoy local delicacies.



GRAND HYATT MACAU

Estrada do Istmo, Cotai, Macau



STUDIO CITY MACAU

Estrada do Istmo, Cotai, Macau



HOTEL ROYAL MACAU

2 Estrada da Vitória, Macau



METROPARK HOTEL MACAU

199 R. de Pequim, Macau



HOUSE OF DANCING WATER

Estrada do Istmo, Cotai, Macau

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Central Asia is now on the radar of Tourism Malaysia; Kuala Lumpur's skyline pictured here

MALAYSIA

By S Puvaneswary

The Ministry of Tourism is targeting 30.5 million foreign tourists in 2016 and RM103 billion (US\$24.9 billion) in tourism receipts. Results for 1H2016 were encouraging, with China showing its biggest 1H growth ever – up 32.1 per cent over the same period in 2015 to reach 992,463 travellers.

Arrivals from China are expected to continue to be encouraging for the rest of the year with the government's launch of an e-visa facility in March.

Total tourist arrivals in 1H grew 3.7 per cent to 13 million from 12.6 million in the corresponding period in 2015.

Tourism receipts for 1H2016 totalled RM37.4 billion, a 10.7 per cent increase compared with 1H2015. The top five arrival markets were Singapore, Indonesia, China, Thailand and Brunei.

Tourism Malaysia has also identified Central Asia as an emerging market and its office in Almaty, Kazakhstan will focus on growing market share in Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Novosibirsk in Russia.

Among key longhaul markets, the UK grew 2.2 per cent in 1H with 206,313 tourists, while Germany suffered negative growth of 7.7 per cent or 67,300 tourists in 1H. The UK and Germany were the top two European source markets for 1Q. Tourism Malaysia will continue its efforts to market the destination to secondary cities such as Manchester and Liverpool in the UK and Munich and Cologne in Germany.

KEY CONTACTS

TOURISM MALAYSIA www.tourism.gov.my

MALAYSIA CONVENTION & EXHIBITION BUREAU
www.myceb.com.my

MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION OF HOTELS www.hotels.org.my

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ✦ Malaysia introduced e-visa services for Chinese and Indian tourists in March and April respectively. The move has removed the inconvenience and waiting time for obtaining a visa and has made Malaysia a more attractive destination for both markets, which are in the top 10 source markets for Malaysia.
- ✦ In late-August 2016, Deputy Prime Minister, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi announced that Malaysia will soon grant visa exemption to Serbs in a move to bolster tourism. The move is expected to boost arrivals from Serbia, a new market, where there were only 600 visitor arrivals for the whole of 2015.
- ✦ In September 2016, the government announced the Passenger Service Charge, also known as airport tax, will be increased at all airports starting in January 1, 2017. The increase will help airport operator, Malaysia Airports, provide better services to passengers. Malaysia Airlines also welcomed the implementation of equal charges between Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and the low-cost klia2 terminal, saying equal charges are crucial to attract new international airlines to boost tourism.
- ✦ The state government of Penang set up the Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau (PCEB) in early-2016 to attract more MICE tourists to the destination. PCEB has since introduced a three-year brand campaign, Experiences Unfiltered, as part of its efforts to position Penang as a preferred destination for business events. This development is in line with Penang's initiative to attract more high-yield tourists. MICE visitors spend three times that of leisure travellers.
- ✦ Star Cruises will be homeporting the *SuperStar Libra* in Penang from September 23, 2016 through to December 31, 2017. It will offer three itineraries during this period. This is a good development for Penang as the cruises will attract more foreign tourists and agents can tap the opportunity to create innovative packages that combine a cruise experience with sightseeing.



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DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

30.5 

/ The number of foreign visitor arrivals, in millions, in 2016 compared to 25.7 in 2015.

 103

/ The amount of tourism receipts, in billions of ringgit and equivalent to US\$25.8 billion, that Malaysia aims to make in 2016, up from RM69.5 billion contributed in 2015.

4.6

/ The average length of stay among ASEAN visitors in 2015, compared to 7.5 nights among Europeans and 9.7 nights among West Asians.



488.60

/ The average per diem expenditure – in ringgit – of foreign visitors in Malaysia in 2015, compared to RM397.60 in 2014.



Source: Tourism Malaysia

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“With Malaysia becoming one of the top destinations in Asia-Pacific for (business) events, we are expecting a significant growth in international conferences coming to the destination in 2017.”

Mandy Wong, country manager – Malaysia, Asiatravel.com Holdings

“As Malaysia is a popular destination for Asian tourists, growth will likely be steady (in 2017). The introduction of e-visas for Chinese and Indian tourists in 2016 will result in a continued high growth from both markets. Safety and security are the main concerns of tourists today, as a result of the increased terrorism attacks globally. If Malaysia can continue to ensure the country is relatively free from these threats, it will have an added advantage in attracting more tourists.”

K L Tan, director, Borneo Trails

“There was a slight recovery in 2016 compared to a disastrous 2015. Hopefully 2017 will see an estimated 10 per cent (increase). The weak ringgit will make Malaysia an affordable destination and tourists might even stay on longer. Asian markets will dominate this growth, particularly China and India.”

Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia

“Regional demand will continue to be strong with the projected opening of Movie Animation Park Studios in December 2016 and 20th Century Fox World Malaysia at Resorts World Genting in 2017. The Middle East is an important market for Malaysia but arrivals in 2017 will largely depend on stability in the Middle East.”

Ally Bhoonee, executive director, World Avenue



Arts and culture are in the spotlight during celebrations of George Town's UNESCO World Heritage Site status in July and August; iconic wall murals in the city pictured above

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Jul 140-16, 2017
**RAINFOREST
WORLD MUSIC
FESTIVAL**

Held in Kuching, Sarawak, this is a unique festival that brings together renowned musicians from around the world and indigenous performers from the interiors of Borneo. Visitors can attend workshops by day, performances at night and enjoy a variety of food and drink stalls and an arts and crafts area.

Jul 29 - Aug 29, 2017
**GEORGE TOWN
FESTIVAL**

This month-long festival is organised to mark the honour of George Town in Penang being designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. There will be more than 100 events, mostly free, and range from art, comedy, dance, exhibition, film, food, music, talks, photography and theatre.

Sep, 2017
**BORNEO
INTERNATIONAL
KITE FESTIVAL**

The dates have yet to be confirmed, but this annual event in Bintulu gathers kite flying enthusiasts who show off their skills to help generate interest in the activity. In addition, festivalgoers can take part in kite-making lessons, attend cultural performances and enjoy a variety of local food.



Experience City Living

THE FACE Suites is Kuala Lumpur's latest all-suite hotel that comprises 200 units of sheer luxury with an inspired design and attention to details with stunning view of Kuala Lumpur city skyline.

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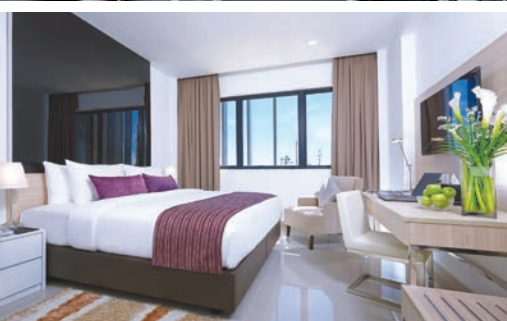
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From top: The Face Suites; Best Western Premier Genting Ion Delemen

WHAT'S NEW

THE FACE SUITES, KUALA LUMPUR

The Face Suites, a luxury all-suite hotel, opened in early 2016 and is conveniently located in the vicinity of The Golden Triangle in Kuala Lumpur. It is within walking distance of the Petronas Twin Towers, KL Tower and Pavilion Kuala Lumpur. Designed to cater to the needs of business and leisure travellers, the 200 key hotel offers one- and two-bedroom suites in four room categories. The fully furnished suites comprise a well-appointed living room, a kitchenette equipped with modern appliances, spacious en-suite king-size bedrooms and a functional work space.

BEST WESTERN PREMIER GENTING ION DELEMEN, PAHANG

Soft opened in October 2016, Best Western Premier Genting Ion Delemen will be the first international hotel brand to open in the fast-growing market of Genting Highlands, in Pahang. The 300-room property is a full-service hotel comprising deluxe, one- two- and three-bedroom suites. Facilities include six F&B outlets, a well-equipped fitness centre, a heated swimming pool and a spa.

TOKB CAFÉ, KUALA LUMPUR

TOKB Café in Section 13, Petaling Jaya, opened in May and serves authentic Kelantanese cuisine with a military theme, as the owners are also collectors of wartime memorabilia. TOKB is short for Taste of Kota Bharu, which is the state capital of Kelantan. Spanning over 557m², the café

has a semi-outdoor area for al fresco dining, an indoor air-conditioned area and a cosy mezzanine floor. In total, TOKB Café can seat around 100 diners comfortably. For private functions, the area can be further extended to accommodate up to 300 people.

THE PIRATE ADVENTURE @ MELAKA ALIVE EXPERIENCE, MALACCA

This new indoor 5D attraction in Malacca is situated at the UNESCO World Heritage Zone. It is located on a to-scale reconstruction of a 15th century *Bahtera Merdeka* ship, which means ship of independence. This is an immersive indoor attraction that promises to engage all five senses. Visitors can pretend to be pirates for a day, navigating the Straits of Malacca before searching the dark and humid jungles for buried treasure. With the aid of sophisticated technology, visitors will feel the powerful gusts of storms on the high seas. It is open from 10.00 until 19.00 every Monday to Thursday, and until 21.30 every Friday to Sunday.

MY CRYSTAL MUSEUM, PENANG

My Crystal Museum in Penang is recognised by the Malaysian Book of Records as the largest museum of natural crystal in Malaysia.

Located on Lorong Baru, next to Sunway Hotel George Town, the museum houses more than 2,000 pieces of natural crystal, mostly from Mt Keriang in Kedah. Visitors can touch some of the crystals on display and learn interesting facts about them from the staff. There is also a souvenir shop selling crystal products such as bracelets and keychains.

HOT THEMES



From left: Go on many adventure rides in Sunway Lagoon; do a Yee Sang toss into rosy health and prosperity during Chinese New Year; learn about rare flora and fauna on Mt Kinabalu

FAMILY FUN

If there is only time for one family attraction while in Kuala Lumpur, spend it at Sunway Lagoon, an outdoor theme park packed with rides and attractions for adults and children.

There are more than 80 rides and attractions spread across Water Park, Amusement Park, Extreme Park, Wildlife Park, Scream Park and the first Nickelodeon-branded attraction in Asia, Nickelodeon Lost Lagoon.

Sunway Lagoon is also home to the world's first Waterplexx 5D and world's largest water ride, Vuvuzela. Other noteworthy attractions include the world's largest man-made Sandy Surf Beach, Malaysia's first interactive zoo, Asia's longest flying fox trail, and one of the longest pedestrian suspension bridges in the country.

GOURMET LURES

Yee Sang or *Yu Sheng* is a salad of raw fish slices – or abalone slices for a more luxurious option, thin vegetables strips and sauces of many flavours which Malaysians and Singaporeans take for granted during the Chinese New Year period but is surprisingly not common in China.

The colourful salad symbolises all the positive things the Chinese desire in the new year, and is often enjoyed among many people who will first toss the ingredients together. The higher one tosses the ingredients, the better the luck.

It is sold in all Chinese restaurants throughout the country during the Chinese New Year.

Visitors who happen to be in Malaysia then should give *Yee Sang* or *Yu Sheng* a try.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

Malaysia is home to many majestic land formations which allow courageous travellers to climb a mountain or explore mysterious depths of caves.

Kinabalu National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage site. While its tourist trails are well-worn, the majority of the park is an unspoilt paradise for rare flora and fauna. For those who are not keen on testing themselves on Mt Kinabalu's slopes, there is still much to enjoy from a visit to the park.

Another UNESCO World Heritage Site is Mulu Caves National Park in Sarawak. It is great for those who love adventure caving.

At Taman Negara National Park in West Malaysia, there are trekking trails, white water rafting opportunities and wildlife observation with an experienced guide.



EASTIN HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR

13, Jalan 16/11, Pusat Dagang Seksyen 16, 46350 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia



OLIVE TREE HOTEL PENANG

76 Jalan Mahsuri, 11950 Bayan Lepas, Penang, Malaysia



SUNWAY LAGOON

13, Jalan PJS 11/11, Bandar Sunway, 47500 Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.



LOST WORLD HOTEL

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New international flights and friendlier visa policies may just give Myanmar's tourism the lift it needs; ancient temples in Bagan pictured here

MYANMAR

By Marissa Carruthers

Myanmar's tourism industry is showing signs of slowing, despite official figures suggesting a boost. Official figures from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism reveal international arrivals have soared from 1.6 million in 2012 to 4.6 million in 2015.

1H2016 has seen a four per cent increase, with a total of 5.5 million visitors forecasted for 2016, rising to 7.5 million by 2019.

However, almost two-thirds of arrivals were day-trippers from neighbouring countries, which would not be counted under most international standards.

Tour operators said ticket sales at popular attractions, such as Bagan and Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, give a truer reflection.

Between January and August, Bagan welcomed 160,000 visitors – an eight per cent increase. A total of 300,000 arrivals are expected this year, compared with about 250,000 in 2015.

More than 517,000 foreigners visited Shwedagon Pagoda in 2015.

Last November's elections, expensive accommodation and poor infrastructure were blamed by the trade for the weaker performance. However, hopes remain high that tourism will grow strongly into the future.

KEY CONTACTS

MINISTRY OF HOTELS AND TOURISM www.myanmar-tourism.org

MYANMAR HOTELIER ASSOCIATION www.myanmarhotelier.org

AIRPORT OF YANGON www.yangonairportonline.com

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ✦ In March 2016, Terminal 1 at Yangon International Airport was unveiled, capable of handling up to 20 million passengers a year. The development is catered towards coping with the anticipated visitor boom and increased number of new flight services.
- ✦ In July 2016, the government unveiled its 12-point economic policy, with no mention of the tourism industry or services sector. It says priority will be given to labour-intensive industries, such as agriculture. This has triggered fears the investment essential to developing the industry will be neglected.
- ✦ In August 2016, Emirates launched a direct flight connecting Yangon with Dubai. It is believed this, coupled with services linking Mandalay and Bangkok by Myanmar National Airlines and Hong Kong Express launching links between Hong Kong and Mandalay and Yangon, will help Myanmar hit its target of 7.5 million visitors by 2019.
- ✦ In September 2016, Myanmar launched an e-visa scheme at three land border crossings with Thailand in a move that is hoped will boost visitors, thanks to the increased ease of access. If successful, it will be rolled out at more crossings.
- ✦ From December 1, Singaporeans travelling to Myanmar will no longer need a visa under a new 30-day visa exemption agreement between the two countries. Similar agreements exist with Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

1.69 

/ The number arrivals to Myanmar between January and August – a four per cent year-on-year increase, based on official statistics.

171 

/ The average amount in US dollars spent a day by tourists in 2015 – US\$1 higher than 2014.

2.1 

/ The amount in billions of US dollars that tourism generated in 2015, accounting for 4.8 per cent of Myanmar's total GDP – a 19 per cent increase on the previous year.



820,000

/ The number of jobs created by the tourism industry in Myanmar, representing 6.5 per cent of the total workforce.

24 

/ The number of carriers flying into Myanmar, compared with 13 in 2012. The latest players include Emirates, Hong Kong Express and Thai Lion Air.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017

“2016 wasn't very good. There was hesitation because of the elections. We expect 2017 to fare much better and are already seeing some positive signs in terms of leisure and corporate travel. The underlying potential here is huge, but we need to be patient. I'm very optimistic about the future. In the long run, Yangon will be a key destination.”

Jean Marc Poli, general manager, Parkroyal Yangon



“With the introduction of several (international) flights by Emirates, Korean Air, Dragonir, Qatar Airways and Singapore Airlines in recent years, Myanmar has become one of the most interesting (and accessible) destination. Hotel chains such as Shangri-la, AccorHotels and Meliá have also entered the marketplace, preparing for strong tourist arrivals.”

Thi Thi Aung, Sales, AVIAREPS Myanmar Myanmar



“We expect a flat situation this year but (business will) pick up again from 2017. We saw a climb in arrivals in the year before the elections, which slumped after. The hotel industry, especially in Yangon, is growing and many more areas are opening up so (arrivals) will grow quickly.”

Sandor Leinwand recte Rein, general manager, Exo Travel Myanmar



“Arrivals have plateaued but that should change quickly. Myanmar is more accessible now, it's seen as less dangerous and more open. There's a lot more positive news in the world media, which contributes towards getting more people here. But there are many challenges. I think the country will break through though, then there will be definite growth.”

Edwin Briels, general manager, Khiri Myanmar



From top: Taunggyi Fire Balloon Festival; and Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda Festival

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Apr 13-21, 2017
MAHA THINGYAN

Also known as the Water Festival, Maha Thingyan is celebrated across five days in the Myanmar New Year. Locals engage in fun water fights to cleanse the mind and wash away bad luck and sins from the year gone by.

Nov 4-10, 2017
TAUNGGYI FIRE BALLOON FESTIVAL

Taunggyi Fire Balloon Festival marks the end of the rainy season with a spectacle of colourful hot air balloons released into the sky in the capital of the Shan State. After sunset, balloons are lit up, and some are packed with fireworks that go off after the balloons reach a certain altitude.

Oct 14-31, 2017
PHAUNG DAW OO PAGODA FESTIVAL

For almost three weeks during the Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda Festival, Inle Lake is brought to life with elaborately decorated boats from across the country carrying sacred statues of Buddha. Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda is located in Ywama.



From top: Parkroyal Yangon; Sanctum Inle Resort

WHAT'S NEW

JUNCTION CITY, YANGON

Located in Yangon's Central Business District, Junction City is one of the city's largest urban projects. The 6.5-acre site comprises Grade A offices, a retail and entertainment centre with a multiplex cinema, and the largest parking facility with 1,500 lots. It is also home to the five-star, 348-room Pan Pacific Yangon, which is slated for a soft opening in 3Q2017.

PARKROYAL YANGON

A two-year renovation, conducted in stages, has lifted Parkroyal Yangon into new realms of luxury. The lobby has transformed into a sophisticated open space, with feature lights and soft furnishings, while dining offerings have upped a gear with new and improved options. All Deluxe and Premier rooms are refreshed, as are 14 one- and two-bedroom serviced suites. Meeting planners can also enjoy a refreshed Grand Ballroom, which now charms with new carpeting, lighting, wall paneling and audiovisual systems.

SANCTUM INLE RESORT

Opened on October 1, 2016 as Inle Lake's first upscale hotel, the 94-room Sanctum Inle Resort boasts an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a fully-equipped gym, the 150m² Sanctuary Suite, a Shan and international cuisine restaurant, and a luxury spa.

BAGAN COMMUNITY TOUR

Recently launched Bagan Urban Adventures

has added a new tour to its itinerary from October 1 in partnership with Action Aid. The six-hour trip gives visitors a glimpse into life in Kyunkalay village, an undeveloped area beyond Bagan, to learn how locals are working with the organisation and using responsible tourism to improve infrastructure and living conditions. The tour includes a trip to the market and introduction to *thanaka*, a traditional paste used for beauty.

TOP GEAR TOUR

Khiri Myanmar recently launched a 5D/4N four-wheel-drive trip that follows the remote route the team from the popular TV show *Top Gear* took through the Shan State. The Eastern Shan State was closed to foreigners until 2013, when Khiri received permission to visit the area with the *Top Gear* crew. The trip starts at Inle Lake and continues to Taunggyi, Palaung villages, Phan Lan and Myin Pan, before arriving in the Shan state capital Kengtung, in the centre of the Golden Triangle – an area notorious for its opium trade.

IBIS STYLES YANGON STADIUM

One of six new properties AccorHotels intends to open in Myanmar by 2019, Ibis Styles Yangon Stadium will welcome guests in late-2016. Located at the Thinganyun Township, the hotel is 25 minutes from Yangon International Airport. Facilities include free WiFi, a café deli, gym, rooftop restaurant and bar, business centre and six function rooms. It will be followed by Pullman Mandalay Mingalar and MGallery Inle Lake Myat Min in 2017.

HOT THEMES



From left: Dig into a feast fit for a king with Khiri's Bagan Food Tour; strap on sturdy boots and explore the mountains in Shan State; and take a lover's retreat to Belmond Governor's Residence, Yangon

GOURMET LURES

Famous for its diverse range of food, eating in Myanmar is always a pleasure. Drawing influences from neighbouring China, Thailand and India as well as its own signature dishes, such as *mohinga*, a rice noodle and fish soup, and tea leaf salad, food features heavily in the lives of locals.

Khiri's Bagan Food Tour presents traditional food fit for a king, taking guests to Myinkaba market before cooking up a banquet of 30 dishes favoured by the former king of Bagan.

Backyard Travel's 8D/7N culinary journey through Myanmar features cooking classes with local chefs, village visits to sample local treats, and many other experiences.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

Having only recently opened up, Myanmar is home to a swathe of unspoiled nature. While infrastructure remains in its infancy and many of the places still remote, the country is opening up and presenting more opportunities for trekking and exploration.

A straightforward trek through paddy fields and among ancient monuments can be done in Inwa, or around the Chin Hills, northwest Myanmar. Serious adventurers can explore the mountain villages in Shan State, in the northeast of the country.

The steady trickle of tourists has led to a series of community-based tourism projects being developed.

ROMANTIC MOMENTS

Myanmar may not conjure up images of romance but with it being home to a host of pristine places, it's awash with romantic spots for weddings and honeymoons.

The unknown Myeik Islands in the south are waiting to be discovered by couples wanting to enjoy pure white sands and shimmering turquoise seas alone. Ngapali Beach is another untouched haven that is starting to welcome a stream of upmarket hotels catering to the growing pool of tourists wanting to experience the country in style.

For lovers desiring a luxurious sojourn, the colonial-style Belmond Governor's Residence is a lovely option.



HALF DAY HOT AIR BALLOON OVER BAGAN TOUR

Bagan, Myanmar



KANDAWGYI PALACE HOTEL

Kan Yeik Tha Road Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township Yangon Myanmar



BEST WESTERN CHINATOWN HOTEL

127-137, Anawraha Road, Corner of Lanmadaw St., Yangon Downtown, Yangon, Myanmar.



AUREUM PALACE HOTEL

Near Bagan Viewing Tower, Min Nanthu Village, Nyaung Oo, Mandalay Division, Myanmar.



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Asian markets contributed the biggest chunk of arrivals to the Philippines – 59.8 per cent in the first seven months of 2016; Our Lady of Remedies Parish, Manila pictured above

THE PHILIPPINES

By Rosa Ocampo

Riding high on the rising popularity and awareness of the Philippines, visitor arrivals are on track to score six million in 2016, up 16 per cent from 5,148,819 the previous year.

Between January-July 2016, visitor arrivals rose by 13.8 per cent to 3,539,310, from 3,109,349 over the same period last year. The growth momentum is expected to be maintained during the high season in September onwards.

The biggest chunk or 59.8 per cent of total Philippine visitor arrivals came from its Asian neighbours: East Asia with 1,770,549 or 50 per cent; ASEAN with 281,183 or 7.94 per cent; and South Asia with 65,823 arrivals.

The Americas cornered 18.1 per cent of total arrivals, followed by Europe 10.66 per cent and Australasia/Pacific 5.3 per cent.

Traditional major markets performed well in 1H2016, with South Korea remaining the biggest contributor with a 23.4 per cent market share. Far second is the US with 15 per cent of the pie, then China with 12 per cent and Japan with 8.6 per cent.

European source markets posted substantial growth albeit from a low base: Germany rising 19.5 per cent to 51,734, France soared by 22 per cent to 35,378, Spain jumped 30 per cent to 16,970, Sweden up 19.9 per cent to 15,932, the Netherlands 12.2 per cent higher to 19,158, Italy rose by 14.2 per cent to 14,420, and Denmark increased 25.3 per cent to 11,899.

KEY CONTACTS

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM www.tourism.gov.ph

TOURISM PROMOTIONS BOARD PHILIPPINES www.tpb.gov.ph

PHILIPPINE TRAVEL AGENCIES ASSOCIATION www.ptaa.org.ph

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ★ As new officials led by Secretary Wanda Tulfo Teo took over the Department of Tourism on July 1, 2016, the travel trade is watching whether there will be continuity in the successful marketing and brand campaigns and road map for tourism development laid out by her predecessor, Ramon Jimenez Jr. For one thing, travel trade reaction is mixed on Teo's announcement to ditch *It's More Fun in the Philippines* in favour of another campaign that will reflect the new Philippines.
- ★ As the government dilly-dallies on whether or not to build a bigger-capacity airport within the metro, over congestion and limited space at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) remains a major stumbling block in tourism. But on the other hand, NAIA's limitations prompt airports in secondary gateways to spruce up, expand and push for direct flights bypassing Manila.
- ★ How fast infrastructure – airports, roads, MRT, cruise facilities, hotels and resorts, tourist attractions – are being built and developed is crucial to tourism. Metro Manila and other major destinations have already been equipped with such tourism hardware but not as much for new and upcoming destinations.
- ★ One of the destination's biggest and fastest-growing source markets is China but it is susceptible to frequent geopolitical tension with the Philippines, resulting in travel bans against the Philippines over the past several years. During the peak months of July-August 2016, Chinese inbound was weakened by a string of charter flight cancellations from China after the International Court of Justice at The Hague favoured the Philippines over China in their territorial claims to Scarborough shoal islands.
- ★ There is a dearth of new developed destinations. The Philippines has a lot more to offer beyond the tourists haunts of Manila, Boracay, Cebu, Bohol and Palawan. But new destinations like Siargao, Siquijor, Baler, Romblon, and many others are not so easily accessible and do not have enough good quality hotels, F&B outlets and other attractions to bring in tourists.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

3.1

/ The amount in billions of US dollars in foreign tourism receipts for January-July 2016, up 14.1 per cent on what was earned in the same period in 2015.



109.35

/ The amount in US dollars that travellers spent on average a day in July 2016, while the average per capita expenditure was US\$926.22.



8.5

/ The average number of nights travellers stay in the Philippines for the month of July in 2016.



5,300

/ The number of keys being added in Metro Manila in 2016.

89

/ The number of domestic travellers – in millions – expected to make trips around the Philippines by 2022. This compares to just 55 million Filipinos who travelled domestically in 2015.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“Right now, Boracay remains one of the most stable destinations for the Philippines (joining other) regulars like Cebu, Bohol and Palawan. In Palawan, Puerto Princesa is experiencing a downtrend as more tourists opt for El Nido and Coron in north Palawan. In terms of upcoming destinations, Davao is becoming more popular due to its connection to Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte (who was mayor of Davao for many years) but might be offset by recent events (the Davao bombings in early-September 2016).”

Jojo Clemente, president, Rajah Tours

“Prospects are still good. The Department of Tourism under the new secretary is continuing the programmes of the previous administration. The slogan *It's More Fun in the Philippines*, I think, is still relevant and effective for 2017. The devaluation of the Philippine peso in September makes it cheaper for foreign tourists to come here.”

Arnie Bayag, consultant, TravelExperts



“With consistent growth and increasing investments into the travel industry in the Philippines, there is no doubt that we will maintain our positive growth into 2017. The market we capture goes beyond the middle-age range – the young ones who prefer budget adventures and the seniors who have spending power for luxurious trips. The Philippines has the capability to offer (a range of) options.”

Nicolas J Rocha, executive vice president for Philippines, Thailand and Hong Kong, Asiatravel.com Holdings

“2017 looks very positive. Right now, the Department of Tourism is trying to increase arrivals from different countries. Groundwork is being done to allow e-visa applications for travellers from China. Local carriers have exciting plans for new longhaul routes, while new destinations are very gung-ho about improving their tourism offerings. New hotels continue to be rise not only in metro Manila but throughout the country.”

Paul So, managing director, Great Sights Travel and Tours



Fancy parades take to the streets of Cebu during the Sinulog festival

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

May 15, 2017
PAHIYAS

Celebrated in Lucban, Quezon, this is one of the most colourful festivals in the Philippines and the country's version of thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest, with celebrations including adorning houses with farm produce and rice wafers called kiping in assorted colours, shapes and designs, as well as street processions.

Nine day, culminating on the third Sunday of January 2017
SINULOG

This is a significant festival in Cebu that infuses both culture and religion. It celebrates the acceptance of Catholicism by locals and the grand street parade is both a solemn and fancy procession with dancer in colourful costumes.

Feb 9-12, 2017
PHILIPPINE INTERNATIONAL HOT AIR BALLOON FIESTA

The country's biggest aviation sports event at Clark Freeport Zone attracts over 100 balloon pilots from around the world in multicoloured hot air balloons. There is also skydiving, flag jumps, microflight demonstrations and freestyle aerobatics.

WHAT'S NEW

HALAL TOURISM

A Muslim Visitor Guide for the Philippines will soon be available as the destination increases its halal capabilities. The guide will include more than 43 halal-certified hotels, resorts and restaurants around the country. A growing number of tour operators, hotels and restaurants, airports and food manufacturers are joining hands in offering Muslim-friendly holiday experiences and facilities for FITs, families and business travellers.

SHANGRI-LA AT THE FORT MANILA

Bonifacio Global City, Metro Manila's financial district, is raising the bar of luxury with 576 rooms and suites ranging in size from 45m² to 47m². It will offer patented body-contouring beds, intelligent lighting and hi-tech business and communication facilities. Also featured are tasteful artworks in public spaces, six cutting-edge bars and restaurants, extensive MICE facilities, and the Kerry Sports Manila Complex with an indoor basketball court, tennis courts, squash courts, a multilevel indoor playground for children and a gym among other facilities.

OKADA MANILA

The country's newest and grandest integrated resort, the US\$2.4 billion Okada Manila located on 44 hectares of prime land, has three upmarket hotels with 993 keys, 21 restaurants and bars and over 50 premier and luxury retail brands to choose from. The piece de resistance is Cove Manila, the uber luxurious indoor beach and nightclub enclosed in a glass dome

that can accommodate up to 4,500 guests. For utmost privacy, its 33 Miami beach house cabanas are scattered around a glorious stretch of genuine white sand indoor beach.

CONRAD MANILA

A minimalist design approach lends understated elegance to the hotel which is connected to SMX Convention Center via a walkway. It boasts 347 "intelligent" rooms that anticipate guests' arrival by automatically moving from energy saving mode to activating air-conditioning, opening the curtains, and setting the mood lighting to match the time of the day. Conrad Manila also has six multifunctional event room for up to 1,000 people, a 24-hour fitness centre, infinity pool, luxury spa and five F&B outlets.

DAHILAYAN ADVENTURE PARK

This adventure playground is tucked in Bukidnon, northern Mindanao. With a breathtaking mountain view, Dahilayan's 840m-long dual zipline 1,433m above sea level guarantees an adrenaline rush. So do the free-wheeling gravity kart, Dropzone with a 37m free fall into the lake, eight-storey platform for the Skytower Base Jump, the highest in the country, and other exciting activities.

I'M HOTEL, MAKATI

Opening progressively from November, highlights at I'm Hotel in Makati include a 3,800m² onsen spa and various novel water treatment concepts. MICE facilities are also available with the phase one opening. Only 100 rooms are available now, with 334 coming online in 1Q2017.



From top: Shangri-La at the Fort; Conrad Manila

HOT THEMES



From left: Interact responsibly with sharks in Palawan waters; volunteer to help locals in the Banaue Rice Terraces rebuild their homes after the 2013 earthquake



GOURMET LURES

Philippine cuisine is varied, with a heavy fusion of local and foreign influences. Sample the exotic in Pampanga, the country's culinary capital where visitors can find Bale Dutung, the restaurant within the house of acclaimed chef, artist and writer Claude Tayag. Foodies can indulge in *sisig* – grilled and diced pig ears and chicken liver – served sizzling or crispy, farm-raised frogs deep fried and stuffed with ground beef, and *buro* or fermented rice with fresh shrimp sautéed in garlic and tomatoes and best served with mustard leaves.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

The province of Rizal, just a few hours overland from Manila, is rich with mountain ranges and forests ideal for mountain climbing, trekking, spelunking, river trails and a bit of canyoneering. Recently opened in Baras, Rizal is the Masungi Georeserve conservation area which is becoming known for its limestone and karst formation and rainforests. The long stretch of green scenery, from Antipolo City passing Tanay up to Pililla, is also good for cycling and motorbike excursions.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Responsible travel options range from interaction with whale sharks in Palawan and Donsol without harming them and their natural habitat to helping communities in the Banaue Rice Terraces, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Bohol, rebuild. When earthquake ruined many of Bohol's ancient churches and other tourist attractions in late-2013, it spawned voluntourism as tourists were encouraged to rebuild the community and develop new attractions in Bohol to rebuild its tourism industry.



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Singapore recorded a double-digit growth in arrivals in the first eight months of 2016; skyline of the city-state's Marina Bay area

SINGAPORE

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Foreign visitor arrivals to Singapore rose 10.3 per cent in the first eight months over the same period in 2015, according to latest figures from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB).

Of the resulting approximate 11.2 million visitors, the majority hailed from within the Asia. Asian travellers in Singapore numbered more than 8.8 million travellers.

The biggest Asian contributors for that period were China and Indonesia. These two markets made up two million (up 43.5 per cent) and 1.9 million (up 6.4 per cent) arrivals respectively. What is significant about this is that China has quickly overtaken Indonesia as Singapore's top source market.

Low See Peng, regional director, Greater China with STB, said the "strong surge in Chinese arrivals" can be attributed to "Chinese (consumers') increased propensity to travel and STB's increased efforts to market Singapore in tier-one and tier-two cities since June 2015".

Low added that increased flights from populous Chinese cities like Guangzhou, Chengdu and Chongqing were key contributing factors too.

Coming in third position was India, contributing 742,219 visitors in the first eight months of 2016, up nine per cent year-on-year.

In terms of tourism receipts, Singapore made S\$5.4 billion (US\$3.9 billion) in 1Q2016, two per cent more than the same period in 2015. Shopping spend rose 25 per cent, accommodation up by seven per cent and F&B by 14 per cent, compensating for a major 21 per cent decline in sightseeing, entertainment and gaming expenditure.

KEY CONTACTS

THE SINGAPORE TOURISM BOARD www.yoursingapore.com

CHANGI AIRPORT changiairport.com

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TRAVEL AGENTS SINGAPORE natas.org.sg

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

✦ The Singapore Tourism Board will be getting S\$700 million (US\$502.8 million) to support its destination promotion activities over the next five years, and a part of it will be channelled into the Business Events in Singapore (BEiS) fund to provide organisers, corporations and associations greater support for their events. At press time, the exact amount of funding for BEiS has yet to be determined.

✦ The award-winning Changi Airport – it picked up Skytrax's World's Best Airport award for the fourth year in a row and seventh in the past 16 years – will debut a new retail and lifestyle complex come early 2019. Named Jewel Changi Airport, the facility will give the airport a further edge amid intensifying competition among global airports. The glass-and-steel Jewel Changi Airport will have five storeys above ground and five under, providing a gross floor area of about 134,000m² that will house retail shops, airport operations, attractions and a hotel.

✦ Eco-tourism offerings in Singapore will expand with the completion of a 126ha wildlife and nature precinct come 2023. The area in Mandai, in northern Singapore, presently houses the Singapore Zoo, the River Safari and the Night Safari. From 2020 onwards, these attractions will be joined by two other attractions – the Bird Park, which will be relocated from Jurong, and the new Rainforest Park. There will also be eco-friendly accommodation options such as camps, tents and family rooms. Altogether, the facilities in the future precinct will sharpen Singapore's ability to compete with its neighbouring destinations for eco-tourists.

✦ There continues to be improvements to Singapore's tourism offerings. The popular resort island of Sentosa is developing two new major areas to offer visitors even more fun activities. One of which is a new nature-based adventure attraction. The Sentosa Development Corporation is calling for proposals to develop a 9,420m² forested area, located on a slope connecting Imbiah Lookout to Siloso Beach, into an attraction for thrill-seekers and nature lovers. Plans for the second site have yet to be announced.

✦ Singapore and Myanmar have inked an agreement that allows visa-free entry for each other's citizens from December 2016. The visa exemption applies to short stays of no more than 30 days, and subject to prevailing entry requirements. This will be a boon to Singapore as Myanmar's outbound travel desires grow along with an improving national economy.

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DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

700

/ The amount in millions of Singapore dollars that has been injected into a new five-year Tourism Development Fund, which will support industry efforts in line with the Singapore Tourism Board's push for quality tourism.



5,533,637

/ The total number of international visitors from January to April 2016, a 14.1 year-on-year increase.

242.40

/ The average hotel room rate for Singapore hotels during the months of January to March 2016, compared to S\$244.60 in 2015.



64,347

/ The number of hotel rooms Singapore is expected to have by the end of 2016, up from 61,947 in 2015.

21.8

/ The amount in billion of Singapore dollars that the city-state made in overall tourism receipts for 2015, a 7.6 per cent year-on-year decline.



PROJECTIONS FOR 2017

“2017 will be a tough year as many industries are failing and people are losing their jobs, plus the effects of Brexit will be setting in. There air of cautiousness may affect holidaymakers' travel decision. Nevertheless, the tourism industry is (resilient) and we have survived some of the most adverse situations before.”

Judy Lum, senior vice president sales & marketing international market, Tour East Singapore

“It won't be better than 2016, as there are no major new attractions. The visa-free arrangement for the Myanmar market may contribute to an increase in arrivals.”

Jaelyn Yeoh, director, Siam Express



“With the planned opening of the new Changi Airport Terminal 4 in 2017, the additional S\$700 million allocated to the Tourism Development Fund from 2016-2020, and the government's efforts to enhance the tourism appeal of lifestyle attractions, local developments and heritage areas, we expect 2017 to be a more promising year.”

Choe Peng Sum, CEO, Frasers Hospitality

“Singapore has seen a steady increase in arrivals year-on-year and we are expecting the same in 2017. This is supported by new hotels in 2016 and 2017, and major events like the F1 Grand Prix, World Gourmet Summit and international trade shows.”

Francis Lee, assistant general manager – contracting, marketing & operations, Asiatravel.com Holdings



St Jerome's Laneway Festival 2016

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Two weekends every August
SINGAPORE NIGHT FESTIVAL

The Singapore Night Festival transforms the Bras Basah/Bugis heritage precinct into a massive nocturnal carnival. See Singapore's heritage, arts and culture in an entirely different light literally, as interactive light installations turn the facades of the Singapore Art Museum and the National Museum of Singapore into ephemeral works of wonder. Various art performances also run during this period

July 2017
SINGAPORE FOOD FESTIVAL

Singapore's delicious melting pot of diverse food culture is celebrated every July through the Singapore Food Festival. Every edition has a special area of focus, and 2016's was all about traditional and modern flavours coming together. At the signature event, Streets, for example, hawkers and chefs served modern creations inspired by Singaporean flavours alongside local favourites. Stay tuned for 2017's theme, and whatever it is, it will whet your appetite.

January 21, 2017
ST JEROME'S LANEWAY FESTIVAL

Over 12 hours of great music, delicious food can be expected at this annual music festival. The boutique music event celebrates new and revered music by non-mainstream bands and artists from all over the world, and 2017's line-up includes Aurora from Norway; Bob Moses from Canada; Bottlemoker from Indonesia; Gang of Youths and Jagwar Ma from Australia; and Sam Rui and T-Rex from Singapore.



From top: National Gallery Singapore; Aerotel Singapore

WHAT'S NEW

NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE

The latest jewel in Singapore's arts crown, the National Gallery Singapore is a new institution housing an unparalleled collection of modern Singapore and South-east Asian art. Expect to experience a variety of programmes including guided tours, artist talks and conversations with curators to gain deeper insights.

AEROTEL SINGAPORE

Aerotel Singapore opened earlier this year at Singapore Changi Airport Terminal 1, just above gate D41 on the third floor. It offers a standard of luxury not often associated with transit hotels. Guestrooms range from budget 10m² single-bedders with shared bathroom facilities to 32m² fully-equipped family rooms for up to five pax. Facilities in the hotel include a swimming pool which is open to non-hotel guests for a fee, a poolside bar, the Library Lounge and a small fitness area. Wi-Fi is free.

AJ HACKETT SENTOSA

Bungy operator AJ Hackett International is building a 50m-tall bungy tower on Sentosa Island, the first of its kind for Singapore. The custom-built tower will feature several experiences such as the Double Bungy, a 47m-high jump deck;

Duo Giant Swings, the world's first double swings where two groups of participants race each other to the ground; and a Vertical Skywalk where guests can walk 44m down the tower shaft. There is also a 40m-long vertical Skybridge that will allow participants of all ages to walk along an open-air platform to take in the sights and watch jumpers take the leap. The tower will be completed by end-2016.

PREMIER INN SINGAPORE BEACH ROAD

The UK's Premier Inn hotel chain has opened the 300-room Premier Inn Singapore Beach Road, located within the city-state's cultural Kampong Glam district and a 15-minute drive from Changi International Airport. It is also nearby the Singapore Sports Hub and Marina Bay area. Amenities at the hotel include complimentary Wi-Fi, a rooftop swimming pool and bar as well as a multi-cuisine restaurant.

MONUMENTAL WALKING TOURS

Monumental Walking Tours feature 90-minute thematic tours created and led by volunteer guides who are heritage enthusiasts keen on sharing interesting facts about the history and architectural features of Singapore's national monuments. Join a night tour to discover the secrets held within the walls of the 128-year-old National Museum.

HOT THEMES



From left: Learn about life in the deep blue sea at S.E.A Aquarium; dig into local favourites at Maxwell Food Centre; enjoy fresh air and beautiful flora at the 150-year-old Singapore Botanic Garden

FAMILY FUN

Much of Singapore's family fun options are concentrated on Sentosa island, where a plethora of attractions are bound to keep visitors entertained for days on end.

For families with younger tots, Port of Lost Wonder water park will provide hours of splashing good fun under the sun, while the various thrilling rides and thematic zones at Universal Studios Singapore theme park will charm the young and young-at-heart.

For some educational fun, head to Resorts World Sentosa's S.E.A Aquarium, home to over 100,000 marine animals from across into 49 different habitats. Also, get to know the bottlenose dolphins at Dolphin Island.

GOURMET LURES

It's no secret that Singapore is one of Asia's biggest culinary capitals, where generations-old hawker fare and elegantly-plated fine-dining dishes are equally celebrated.

For a taste of good old street food, Maxwell Food Centre is a great option. It houses over 100 stalls serving favourites of Singapore's diverse communities. Old Airport Road Food Centre is another treasure trove.

Should one prefer fancier surrounds, Marina Bay Sands offers a selection of 10 celebrity chef restaurants. The latest of the lot is Adrift by David Myers, where signature dishes king crab melt and wagyu cheeseburger have won over many hungry hearts.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

Amid Singapore's jungle of skyscrapers are lush green spaces that offer visitors a breath of fresh air and some outdoor fun.

Two easily accessible nature draws are: Gardens by the Bay, which has a 22m-high aerial walkway linking two towering Supertrees and offering visitors a splendid view of the massive waterfront park; and the 150-year-old Singapore Botanic Gardens which was recently bestowed UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

Away from the city centre is Coney Island Park, located off the north-eastern coast of Singapore. The rustic park is home to a wide variety of biodiversity.

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Nami Island is often featured in the itinerary of Asian visitors to South Korea

SOUTH KOREA

By Julian Ryall

After a fairly dismal year for the tourism industry in 2015, South Korea has powered back onto the international travel scene in 1H2016. Between January and July, more than eight million foreign tourists landed in South Korea, up 21 per cent year-on-year, according to the Korea Tourism Organization. Chinese visitorship alone was up 27 per cent.

And in another positive indication that the country has shaken off the factors that so hurt the travel sector last year, South Korea's air passenger traffic soared more than 43 per cent in July 2016 from the previous year.

The transport ministry said international figures climbed an impressive 54.4 per cent year-on-year to 6.73 million.

South Korea's inbound sector was hard-hit in the summer of 2015 by an outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Virus (MERS), which claimed more than 30 lives but decimated visitor numbers.

Visitors from Taiwan were down 75.7 per cent in June 2015, while arrivals from Hong Kong shrank 74.6 per cent. Inbound travellers from Singapore fell more than 62 per cent.

Other travellers were also reportedly put off by growing tensions on the border with North Korea.

The positive figures recorded since January 2016, however, mean that South Korea is on track to match the government's target of 16.5 million overseas arrivals for the full year.

KEY CONTACTS

KOREA TOURISM ORGANIZATION english.visitkorea.or.kr

KOREA CONVENTION BUREAU mice@mail.knto.or.kr

KOREA ASSOCIATION OF TRAVEL AGENTS www.kata.or.kr

INCHEON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT www.airport.kr

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

More than 3.8 million Chinese tourists visited South Korea between January and June, accounting for 47 per cent of all foreign visitors. As recently as 2005, they accounted for just 12 per cent of the total. In 1H2016, Chinese visitors spent 4.3 trillion won (US\$3.8 billion) on credit cards alone – underlining the importance of the Chinese market to the South Korean travel industry. Yet geopolitical tensions remain between Seoul and Beijing, and the travel sector needs to beware placing too many of its eggs in one basket.

The emergence of more affordable four-star hotels in Seoul has helped the South Korean capital city to grow international business event numbers. Cost conscious markets, such as Singapore, used to think twice about hosting events in Seoul, but the increasing supply of new and affordable four-star hotels have recently swung decisions in favour of the city.

Seoul Tourism Organization recently expanded its support programme for business event groups. One of the two latest offerings is a series of special tours that provide delegates an in-depth look at the city's culture and key industries. The other new offering is the Seoul MICE Card, which is given to event delegates attending qualifying business events in Seoul. These rechargeable and reusable cards come with a 5,000 won (US\$4) credit and can be used on public transport and with selected merchants.

South Korea has been declared free of Middle East Respiratory Virus (MERS), which caused such chaos within the country's tourism industry in 2015. It is crucial that the national tourism agency and the industry at large continue to communicate the message that South Korea is a safe destination for tourists to visit.

Plans are in place for South Korea to better position the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), its heavily fortified border with North Korea, as a tourist destination. The Korea Tourism Organization hosted a one-day workshop in April near the border, telling travel trade attendees and government officials that it intends to organise new programmes for the DMZ. Plans include turning the former US military base Camp Greaves into a tourist destination. Locations used in the filming of popular TV series *Descendants of the Sun* are also being earmarked as attractions.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

10,000 

/ The minimum number of delegates that will flock to South Korea's Seoul and Busan over six months between autumn 2016 and spring 2017 for a corporate incentive. The group from Tokyo-based mutual fund society, Zengokyo, will be the largest Japanese incentive group to ever visit South Korea.

15.2 

/ The estimated income, in billions of US dollars, from overseas tourists in 2015, down 14.3 per cent from the previous year.

49 

/ The millions of passengers who transited at Incheon International Airport in 2015.



186

/ The number of cities around the world that are connected to Incheon International Airport via flight services.



954

/ Sales, in millions of US dollars, at South Korean duty free stores in July, an all-time high and up 4.1 per cent from the previous month.

PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“Seoul has seen continual growth from our neighbours including China in particular. We've seen a steady increase of Chinese FIT visitors relying on digital information to explore the city instead of mostly large-sized tour groups we've welcomed in the past. In fact, the number of Chinese FIT visitors to Seoul has grown to be more than half the number of total visitors from China. Seoul is also increasing its offerings to meet the rising demand of visitors emphasising “smart” tourism as well as fair and sustainable tourism that benefits and promotes the coexistence of both visitors and locals.

Joon Lee, executive director, Tourism & MICE Division, Seoul Tourism Organization

“South Korea is a country where the experience changes with the four distinct seasons, where kimchi and K-pop had originated from, and where one can experience both ancient history of thousands of years old and cutting-edge technology at the same time. It is also a unique country that is still on a truce with North Korea. With such varied experiences, inbound arrivals to South Korea looks bright in 2017.”

Sue Hyun Kim, team leader, Sharp TEC&L, Inc



“The massive earthquake that hit South Korea (in September; epicentre in Gyeongju, with tremors felt as far as Seoul) and the recent spike in North Korea's missile and nuclear tests have been hogging news headlines, but our clients do not seem too concerned. These may not be a problem for our business in 2017.”

Una Liu, office manager, Alpha Young Travel Agency, Seoul

“We expect a good year in 2017. We are seeing more customers from a wider range of countries coming to Seoul, which is welcome after the MERS outbreak in 2015. The country is hosting the Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang in 2018, and we expect interest in South Korea to rise in the run-up to the event.”

Lee Myung-suk, front desk manager, The Hamilton Hotel, Seoul



Dive into summer at the popular Boryeong Mud Festival

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Jan 7-29, 2017
**HWACHEON
SANCHEONEO
ICE FESTIVAL**

The icy landscape of Hwacheon County hots up in January with the Hwacheon Sancheoneo Festival which features ice sculptures, sleigh trips, bobsled rides and myriad other winter attractions.

Jul 14-23, 2017
**BORYEONG MUD
FESTIVAL**

The Boryeong Mud Festival is an excellent excuse for rolling around in mud for nine days in summer, with sporting events such as mud wrestling and mud swimming held at the Daechin Beach Mud Plaza.

Sep 29-Oct 8, 2017
**ANDONG MASK
DANCE FESTIVAL**

South Korea's finest traditional dance troupes gather in Andong to perform mask dances, such as the *byeolsingut talnori* dance, which is recognised as an Important Intangible Cultural Asset of Korea.

WHAT'S NEW

WHINNY WORLD, GWACHEON

South Korea's newest amusement park opened in September to offer horse-themed fun. Appropriately named Whinny World, the attraction sits in the middle of a horse-racing track at Gwacheon, Gyeonggi Province. It opens year-round and is independent of the race track which only operates on weekends. Korea Racing Authority, which backs the attraction, hopes Whinny World will help to rid the sport of a negative image associated with gambling.

SHILLA STAY GURO, SEOUL

Shilla Stay has opened its eighth property in Seoul's digital district of Guro. Spanning 25 floors with three room categories – standard, deluxe and grand – the 310-key Shilla Stay Guro is a five-minute walk from Guro Digital Complex Station and within close proximity to the Guro Digital Complex. The business hotel offers three multi-purpose meeting rooms and a business corner equipped with high-speed Internet access and computers. Other facilities include a fitness centre and an F&B outlet.

GANGNEUNG HANOK VILLAGE

Work is under way in the eastern coastal city of Gangneung to create a traditional *hanok* village for foreign visitors. The showcase village will promote the beauty of traditional Korean homes and buildings close to Ojukcheon House, where 16th century painter and poet Shin Saimdang gave birth to the celebrated Confucian scholar Yulgok. The *hanok* village will

also have places where visitors can learn about tea etiquette, folk games and traditional music.

CITADINES HAN RIVER SEOUL

Ascott has entered the South Korean market with the opening of Citadines Han River Seoul serviced residence on Seonyudo island. Each unit is equipped with a kitchen and laundry facilities, while residents have access to a gym. The property has easy access to the city centre, major business facilities, entertainment venues and shopping centres, and is a five-minute stroll to Seonyudo subway station.

DONHWAMUN TRADITIONAL THEATRE, SEOUL

Donhwamun Traditional Theatre opened in August in Seoul's Changdeokgung district, specialising in traditional Korean music. The new building bears a design that is inspired by traditional *hanok* homes to preserve the cultural identity of the neighbourhood. The 140-seat concert hall will host a variety of traditional and contemporary interpretations of Korean performances, with all concert programmes offering English translations.

HOTEL CAPPUCCINO, SEOUL

Hotel Cappuccino in Seoul's Gangnam is a minimalist-chic 141-key property with three function rooms for eight to 30 people in a classroom configuration, a 100-pax rooftop terrace with views of the cityscape, and work stations in the lobby, among other facilities. Travellers with their fur kids in tow will appreciate the hotel's Bark Room, a dog-friendly accommodation option.



From top: Whinny World, Gyeonggi; Shilla Stay Guro, Seoul; Hotel Cappuccino, Seoul

HOT THEMES

Korea Tourism Organization



From left: Sample North Korean cuisine in the more accessible South at Neung-ra Table Restaurant; stay and play at the unique Sun Cruise Resort in Gangwon province



GOURMET LURES

North Korea is a notoriously difficult place to visit and, even for those who do make it inside the hermit kingdom, there is no guarantee that they will have the opportunity to sample genuine local cuisine. Tens of thousands of defectors have settled in the South however, with many bringing their traditional flavours with them.

Since opening in 2013, Neung-ra Table in Seoul's Chongno district has built a reputation for serving up the finest and most authentic North Korean dishes in the South. Set up by Lee Ae-ran, a defector and now a human rights activist, Neung-ra Table's must-eats include *naksadon jeongol*, a chowder that mixes boiled octopus and pork with apple seasoning, and Pyongyang-style *onban*, boiled rice served in a chicken broth.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

With almost three quarters of its landscape made up of mountains, South Korea is a paradise for hikers. And one does not need to go far from Seoul to have a go at a mountain. Bukhansan is one of seven mountains in Seoul, and one can hike up to Baegundae peak from Bukhansanseong Hiking Support Center in just three hours.

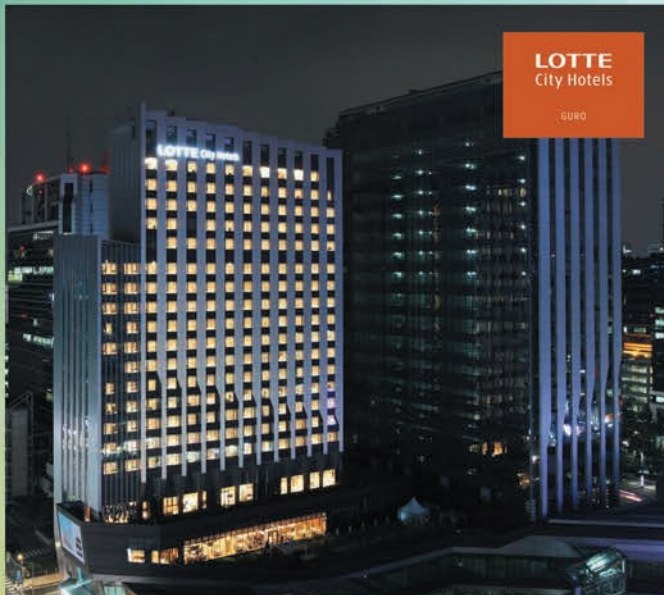
Close by in Gangwon province are Seoraksan and Taebaeksan. Seoraksan's highest peak, Daecheongbong, can be conquered in just three hours, depending on the hiker's speed. For an easier, shorter hike lasting two hours, head for Ulsanbawi Rock where one can take in views of the sea and valleys below. Taebaeksan's highest peak, Janggunbong, is a gentle hike of no more than two hours from Baekdan Temple.

FAMILY FUN

Besides the K-pop lure, South Korea is also a family-friendly destination with many exciting theme parks for everyone and massive indoor playgrounds catered to younger children.

One of the hottest and largest theme park in the country is Everland Resort in Gyeonggi province, which has thrilling rides and fun performances spread out across five zones such as Zootopia and Magic Land.

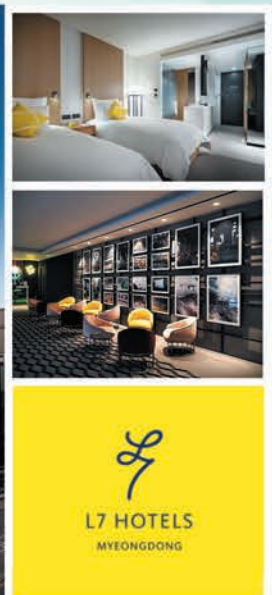
Another option is Sun Cruise Resort in Gangwon province. The 211-room hotel, built in the shape of a cruise ship, perches atop a cliff in Jeongdongjin and promises the best sunrise view in the whole of South Korea. Surrounding the hotel is a themed park with various landscaped gardens that provide picturesque backdrops for memorable photos.



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Despite brisk tourism hardware development across Sri Lanka, the country has been able to retain its traditional charms; fishermen at sea

SRI LANKA

By Feizal Samath

The years 2016 and 2017 can be dubbed years of rapid transformation for Sri Lanka’s tourism industry, which has seen stellar growth and continues to prosper.

The skyline of capital city Colombo will change dramatically with the opening of new top-end hotels under international brands such as Shangri-La, Grand Hyatt, Sheraton and Movenpick – all coming up in 1H2017. The landscape transformation continues in Sri Lanka’s southern coast, which will welcome Marriott and Sheraton properties also in 1H2017.

However, with these new hotels injecting 1,394 rooms into Sri Lanka’s accommodation inventory, plus even more to come with other luxury and mid-range hotels opening throughout 2017, the country might have an oversupply problem in its hands.

In a recent analysis, Srilal Miththapala, a tourism and hospitality specialist, said that if the current room stock were to rise beyond 45,000 in 2017 and the years forward from a current 33,000 rooms, Sri Lanka would have a room surplus.

Ongoing efforts by Sri Lanka’s tourism stakeholders to expand its product range and experiences for tourists may help raise arrivals and soften the impact of the room oversupply.

A Tourism Vision 2025 is in the works by the authorities, in consultation with private sector players.

“Tourism Vision 2025 is not an operational plan for a national brand, marketing strategy, advertising campaign, country slogan or action plan. Rather, it is a strategic positioning of Sri Lanka in the international tourism market, which sets the foundations on which the sector can build,” the preliminary report prepared by the government, states.

What’s still missing is a proper, concentrated destination promotion campaign that has yet to take off after years of planning. The government says this will happen in 2017.

KEY CONTACTS

SRI LANKAN AIRLINES: www.srilankan.lk

SRI LANKA TOURISM PROMOTION BUREAU: www.srilanka.travel

TRAVEL AGENTS ASSOCIATION OF SRI LANKA:
www.travelagentsofsrilanka.com

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ★ Sri Lanka celebrated 50 years of tourism in 2016 with several events including a UNWTO conference on peace as a binder in post-conflict countries. With its tourism performance being the biggest success story since the end of a violent separatist struggle in 2009, Sri Lanka is putting all its eggs into this basket to make it the second highest foreign exchange earner by 2025, second only to remittances by Sri Lankan workers abroad.
- ★ SriLankan Airlines’ pullout from Europe is likely to have some impact on tourist arrivals due to fewer direct connections. Looking to stem huge losses, the national carrier is stopping direct flights to Paris, Rome and Frankfurt, and focusing on a strategy of being a regional – Asia and South Asia – carrier where there is better revenue sources.
- ★ Sri Lanka is slated to discontinue the controversial minimum hotel room rates by March 31, 2017, at the end of the winter season. The requirement was enforced many years ago in Colombo city to curb price cutting. Under this, five-star hotels had to charge a minimum US\$185 nett per night, a decision which top hotels in the capital were unhappy with and urged free pricing. Naturally, smaller hotels which have benefited from the minimum hotel room rate requirement are not in favour of its planned removal.
- ★ Hosting the annual congress of the National Union of Travel Agents of France from October 31 November 2, 2016 in Colombo is one of the biggest achievements this year for the local MICE sector. Industry officials said it took many years to build momentum and convince French agents to take their annual event to Sri Lanka. Nearly 500 agents from France attended the event, which is set to boost Sri Lanka as a destination for Europeans.
- ★ The June 2016 opening of Shangri-La’s Hambantota Resort & Spa on the southern coast heralded the entry of an international hotel chain onto Sri Lankan soil in post-war era. The 300-key luxury resort which boasts its own on-site golf course is also notable because it raises the tourism appeal of the southern coast. Meanwhile, another Shangri-La mixed development is set to open in Colombo, along with several other hotels of major brands.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

213,103

/ The number of Chinese arrivals in January-September 2016. The global powerhouse is tipped to overtake India as Sri Lanka's largest source market in 2017.



1,394

/ The number of new rooms that will come on line from international branded hotels opening in 2017.



50

/ The number of 'best tourism experiences in Sri Lanka' hatched by a new tourism plan that was launched in September 2016.



1,000,000

/ The projected employment in the tourism industry by 2025 in a proposed tourism strategy under preparation, against 319,436 employed in 2015.



27

/ The number of international airlines connecting 25 countries to Sri Lanka, with a few new ones set to come in with the tourism boom in the country.



13

/ The number of international hospitality brands present in Sri Lanka today or about to enter, as at May 2016.



PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“Tourism will grow in 2017 as we see a sharp rise in Chinese arrivals. While they used to come during the two-week Chinese New Year vacation, they are now visiting throughout the year. The surge in Chinese arrivals is also partly due to the promotional efforts of Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau. To enhance the destination image, the bureau should either set up its own office in China or appoint (marketing representatives) in various Chinese cities. It would be a bonus to just attract one per cent of the outbound Chinese market to Sri Lanka.”

Ahintha Amarasinghe, chairman/managing director, Worldlink Travels



“The growth momentum will continue into 2017, with traffic from the Indian Sub-Continent and China seeing a sharp rise. Both markets will be Sri Lanka's main tourism source. There will be a demand for differentiated products, while a whole range of new products coming online next year will enhance the marketplace.”

Ajit Gunewardena, deputy chairman, John Keells Holdings



“Tourism prospects for 2017 are much brighter than in previous years. Although Sri Lanka was always considered a sought-after tourism destination, the present impetus is due to the stable government and peace. However, all stakeholders should continue to take a professional and planned approach in marketing the destination and uplifting service quality, while offering value-for-money propositions.”

Chandra Mohotti, senior vice president, Galle Face Hotel Group



Beira Lake in Colombo lights up for Vesak day

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Apr 13 - 14, 2017
SINHALA AND TAMIL HINDU NEW YEAR

The New Year festival marks the end of the paddy harvesting season, and the country shuts down for two days of celebrations that involve feasting on traditional delicacies and playing games.

May 21 - 23, 2017
VESAK

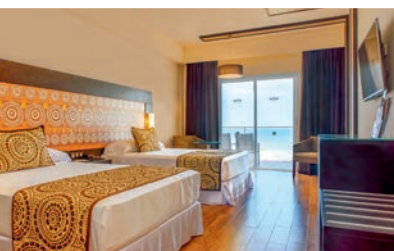
Observed by Buddhists, Vesak marks the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha with religious ceremonies. Roads are decorated with vibrant, giant pandals and lanterns, and free food and drinks are offered at roadside stalls everywhere.

Jul 29 - Aug 7, 2017
ESALA PERAHERA

This ancient festival is celebrated in Kandy, Sri Lanka to commemorate the first teaching given by Buddha after he attained enlightenment. Lively processions and performances are a signature of Esala Perahera.

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We're all about you



From top: Shangri-La's Hambantota Resort & Spa; Old Colombo Mosque; and RIU Sri Lanka

WHAT'S NEW

SHANGRI-LA'S HAMBANTOTA RESORT & SPA

Opened in June, Shangri-La's Hambantota Resort & Spa is the first major hotel brand to arrive in post-war Sri Lanka. Spanning over 18ha, the 300-key beachfront property features a variety of dining outlets, a multi-purpose events space, CHI Spa, a gym, a dive centre, a 30-metre lap pool and freeform pool, lush tropical gardens, a tennis court, an 18-hole golf course, an artisan village and a variety of adventure options.

The luxury experience can be enjoyed right from arrival at Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo. Guests are transported by private luxury coach to the hotel, with refreshments and cold towels offered during the drive along a scenic coastal route.

HILTON COLOMBO

Following a massive renovation, Hilton Colombo launched two refreshed dining establishments – Graze Kitchen and Lab Lounge and Bar – in September. The all-day dining Graze Kitchen offers both a buffet line and an a la carte menu. Lab Lounge and Bar is themed around the rainforests of Sri Lanka, with sculptures of wild, wandering deers and leopards greeting guests as they enter.

RIU SRI LANKA

Spanish hotel company RIU Hotels & Resorts made its first venture into Asia with the opening of the five-star, 501-key RIU Sri Lanka in Ahungalla. The new-build hotel offers 24-hour all-inclusive service and is located on the beach. Facilities include two buffet restaurants, four bars, three large pools, a children's pool, sunbathing terraces, Jacuzzi, a gym, the Renova Spa wellness centre and Pacha nightclub where customers can party till the wee hours.

KHIRI TRAVEL'S JAFFNA TOUR

Bangkok-based Khiri Travel in July introduced a tour itinerary to Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka, one of the first agencies to do so now that the surrounding region has recovered from civil conflict. The 4D/3N package allows travellers to explore the place by train, bicycle, jeep or catamaran. Highlights of the itinerary include a train ride aboard the Queen of Jaffna that passes through the main conflict region, a visit to Casuarina Beach, a full-day ride on a catamaran to nearby islands, and many more.

TREKURIOS.COM

Trekurious.com offers a range of unique itineraries that are led by architects, historians, authors and sportspersons. An example of an itinerary is the Dodgy Bar Tour of Colombo, where a local takes visitors through the city's oldest watering holes and share quirky facts relating to the origins and history of each bar while sipping on local beers.

HOT THEMES



From left: Fill up on string hoppers or hoppers while in Sri Lanka; discover romantic moments at Ceylon Tea Trails; lounge about on the beaches of Kalpitiya or head off the coast for a dive



GOURMET LURES

No visitor will return to home without tucking into string hoppers or hoppers, popular Sri Lankan delicacies served at breakfast or dinner. String hoppers are made from a dough of rice meal or wheat flour which is pressed out in circles from a string mould onto little wicker mats and then steamed. Hoppers are made from rice or wheat flour and coconut mixed to a smooth batter and transformed into crispy bowl-shaped pancakes. For a taste of both, visit Upali's by Nawaloka restaurant at 65, C.W.W. Kannangara Mawatha, Colombo 7.

ROMANTIC MOMENTS

Sri Lanka's pristine, natural environment and friendly, educated and hospitable people make a potent combination in positioning the country as a refreshing destination for honeymoons. An elegant storybook romance can be created in the restored colonial-era tea planter residences of Ceylon Tea Trails, seated 1,250m up in the highlands near Hatton. Or if lazing on a serene, palm-fringed beach with arms entwined is preferred, the boutique Paradise Road The Villa Bentota or Robinson Crusoe-esque Jungle Beach Resort might do the trick.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

Sri Lanka's geographical diversity provides any adventurous visitor a paradise to explore. Snorkelling, scuba diving and surfing are available off the coasts of Kalpitiya, Hikkaduwa, Bentota and Arugam Bay, while hiking and trekking can be done across the country's many mountains, lush green forests and paddy fields. The towns of Kandy and Nuwara Eliya in the central hills are great options for keen hikers and trekkers. Active folks can also embark on a two-week long bicycle tour of the country. Check out SpiceRoads Cycle Tours for a variety of programmes.



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South-east Asia is Thailand's second biggest source market, just five per cent behind China in August 2016; Bangkok at dusk

THAILAND

By Michael Sanderson and
Chadamas Chinmaneevong

Records will break when the final tourist numbers are counted, with 2016 set to be remembered as the year Thailand first achieved 30 million arrivals.

Since taking office as Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) governor in September 2015, Yuthasak Supasorn focused on reducing Thailand's tourism risks in view of a fragile world economy and unpredictable tourism sentiments in Thailand's main source markets.

One of his first tasks was to crack down on zero-fare tours to reduce the country's dependence on high-volume markets like China and Western Europe.

TAT has also turned its focus to South-east Asia, which contributes almost as much arrivals as China. As of August, the region accounted for 25 per cent of international arrivals into Thailand. Chinese arrivals made up about 30 per cent.

Yuthasak said there is potential to grow South-east Asian numbers by promoting Thailand as a weekend destination and by dangling shopping, medical treatments and wellness programmes as key lures.

TAT plans to open offices in countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar and the Philippines over the next few years. Yuthasak believes that "(arrivals from) these countries will grow at least 10 per cent in the first year of the establishment of the new offices".

Beyond the region, TAT opened an office in Prague mid-August to tackle Central European markets, and will further extend its reach in the western world with an office in Sao Paulo, Brazil and Toronto, Canada by September 2017.

Once these are accomplished, TAT intends to establish a physical presence in Johannesburg to oversee marketing in South Africa.

KEY CONTACTS

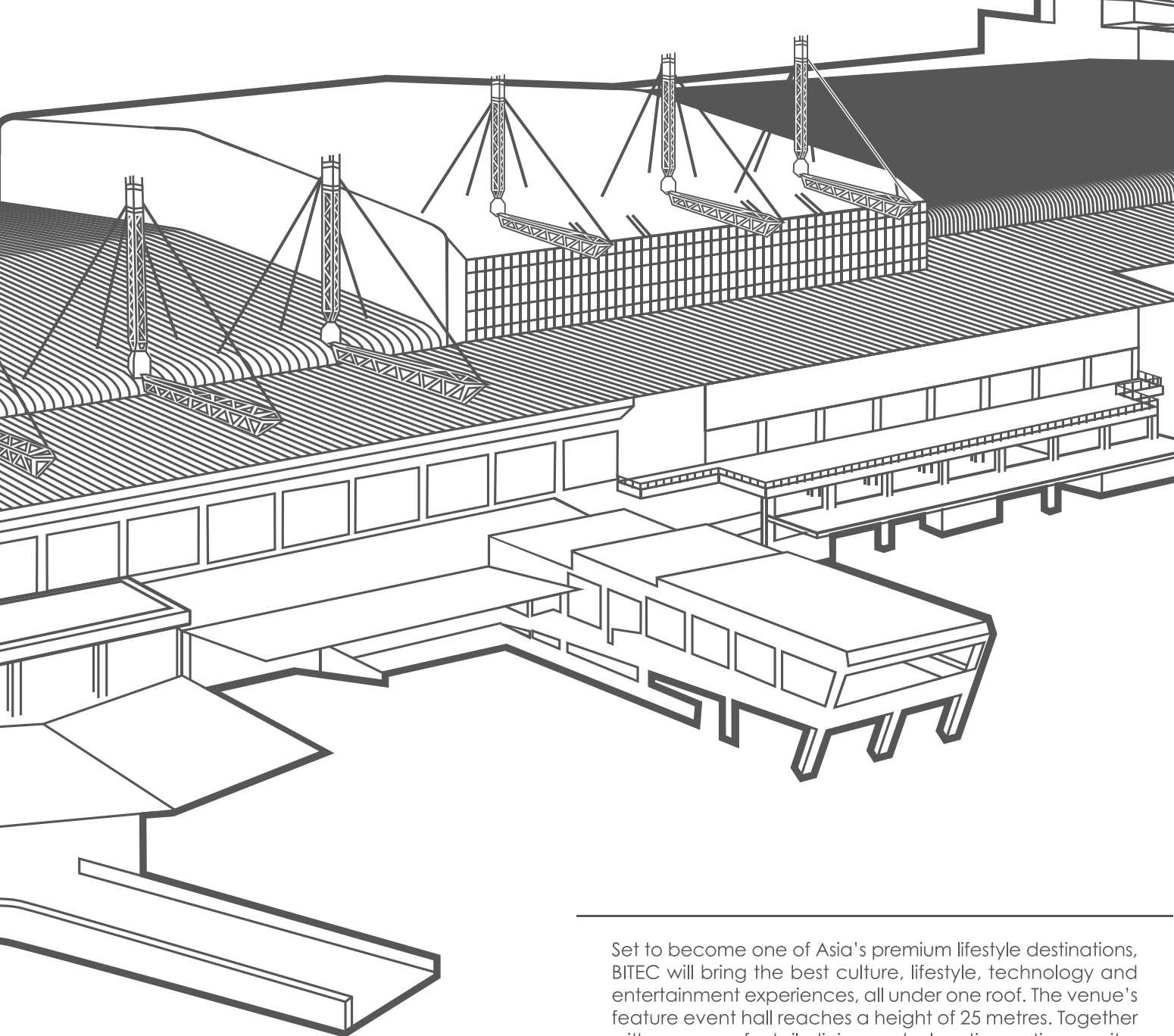
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5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ✦ Airports of Thailand took the unusual step of calling for private investment in Krabi airport amid budgetary concerns. Its investment potential was talked up, but with the country's six biggest airports undergoing expansion it raised questions about the government's ability to provide the infrastructure for the boom in visitor numbers.
- ✦ After trying to encourage Chinese tourists to spend money on local products and services, Thailand got serious about closing down zero-dollar tours and nominee companies in August. The crackdown is thought to have contributed to the slower growth in the Chinese inbound market, although many operators have long called for action.
- ✦ The "red flag" from the International Civil Aviation Organisation over significant safety concerns in June 2016 led to the creation of the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand. After a rocky start, with the first director removed, audits resumed in September in an attempt to restore the country's standing.
- ✦ In September 2016, Thailand doubled its visa-on-arrival fee to 2,000 baht (US\$57), affecting key markets like China and India. Designed to encourage visitors to arrange the cheaper visas in advance and reduce congestion at entry points, it was criticised for being out of sync with the region.
- ✦ Thailand went into mourning with the passing of the Kingdom's beloved monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, on October 13, 2016. The Thai tourism authorities and local tourism players swung quickly into action to assure travellers and business event organisers and their delegates that Thai still welcomes them, while advising how best to behave during the mourning period.

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DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

2.58

/ The amount in trillions of baht, or US\$73.7 billion, the Tourism Authority of Thailand anticipates the sector will generate in 2016, up 14 per cent from 2015.



51,301

/ The amount in baht that Thailand makes in tourist receipts per arrival, or just under US\$1,500, in 1Q2016, a 4.1 per cent year-on-year rise.



8.3



/ The percentage of year-on-year growth in arrivals to Thailand for all countries except China in 1H2016. Over the same period in 2015, growth was a 8.8 per cent.

47.9



/ The average percentage increase in inbound Chinese tourists between 2010 and 2015, a growth rate unlikely to be matched in the coming years.

13.2

/ The percentage of Thailand's GDP that came from tourism in 1Q2016, more than the country's agricultural sector.



PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“We’ve never seen a more robust growth in arrivals than this year’s, with over 22 million arrivals to date. Time and again, Thailand has proven to be the favourite destination of the world. (The uptrend) will continue in 2017. The industry is now slowly moving away from quantity to quality and experiential focus, which is (what) we’ve already started pursuing to stay relevant.”

Francis R Asuncion, vice president for Thailand, Asiatravel.com Holdings

“Thailand’s future looks bright with most Asian markets continuing to chalk up large increases in arrivals to the Kingdom, and most European markets seeing an upward trend. No wonder really, considering what Thailand has to offer tourists. There is no better value for money anywhere else in Asia, and service levels are top-notch.”

Laurent Kuenzle, CEO, Asian Trails



“New airline routes, a new terminal at Phuket airport, and new hotel developments will help to accommodate (an expected) growth (in tourist arrivals). Terrorism in the country remains the main threat.”

Jean-Baptiste Richard, assistant general manager, EXO Travel Thailand

“We have full confidence of continuing our growth in established European markets in 2017, but we are also looking at other areas where potential is strong such as the US, the Middle East, India and within the Asia region.”

Victor Mogilev, general manager, Diethelm Travel Thailand



From top: The people of Ubon Ratchathani celebrates the start of Buddhist Lent with a parade of elaborate candles; float a thanksgiving candle down a river during Loy Krathong

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

May 5-9, 2017
**NGAN BUN
BANG FAI**

Also known as the rocket festival, this is celebrated in Yasothon in north-eastern Thailand to pray for a good rainy season. The larger the offerings of rockets, the noisier the rockets sputter and the higher they go into the sky are welcome indications of a good rainy season.

Full moon in
Jul 2017
**UBON
RATCHATHANI
CANDLE FESTIVAL**

Marking the start of the Buddhist Lent or *Phansa*, the festival unique to Ubon Ratchathani sees a procession of participants bearing elaborately sculpted *lenten* candles.

Nov 4, 2017
LOY KRATHONG

Regarded as one of the most beautiful and romantic event in Thailand, Loy Krathong sees people floating candles down rivers in a thanksgiving ceremony. The grandest celebrations are said to be in Chiang Mai, during which festivalgoers release lit lanterns up into the night sky.

WHAT'S NEW

BANGKOK INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND EXHIBITION CENTRE

Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Centre completed its expansion in November 2016, now boasting 70,000m² of event space. New hardware includes three event halls, 12 meeting rooms, three convention halls, retail and dining areas, an outdoor concert area and a mixed-use office building.

EXPLORE! BANGKOK FOODY TOUR

Asian Trails offers a four-day gourmet experience in Bangkok for food lovers. The tour starts with the Loy Nava Dinner Cruise on the Chao Phraya river, where guests get an introduction to the country's herbs and spices while taking in the temples and city skyline from a converted rice barge. One morning is dedicated to exploring fresh markets and gems in hidden alleyways with a guide, while an evening is devoted to Chinatown. A class at the Baipai Thai Cooking School and free time ends the tour. Choice of hotel includes the Rembrandt and Aetas Lumpini.

RAMAYANA WATER PARK, PATTAYA

With 21 water slides, a wave pool, a lazy river, a floating market and more, the Ramayana Water Park is Thailand's newest and largest world-class water park. Spanning 16 hectares and located near the beach just 20 minutes south of Pattaya on the eastern coast, the attraction also boasts elephant rides, a maze, two dedicated children's zones and private cabanas, plus massages, VIP lounges and Wi-Fi throughout. Entry costs 1,190 baht (US\$34) for adults and 790 baht for children. Family packages are available.



THE SLATE, PHUKET

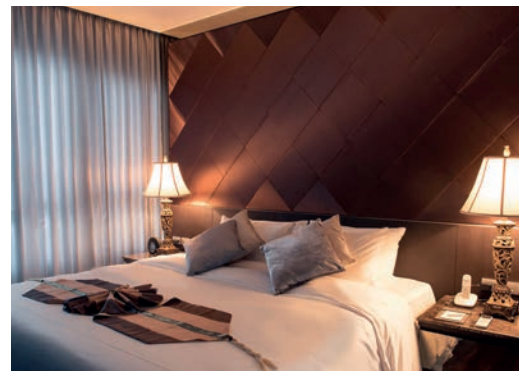
The former Indigo Pearl Resort in Phuket's Nai Yang area has been rebranded to The Slate, which reopened in August. Along with refreshed suites and villas, The Slate also features updated bars and restaurants with overhauled menus that include a wider range of healthy options alongside traditional cuisine. With a cooking school, yoga and archery all available, The Slate is offering a holistic wellbeing package for business groups or executives.

X2 VIBE BURIRAM HOTEL

The luxury X2 Vibe Buriram Hotel has 68 suites, meeting rooms, cafes and a rooftop bar. It sits conveniently near shopping malls and both the 32,600-seat Buriram United football stadium and Buriram United International Circuit speedway.

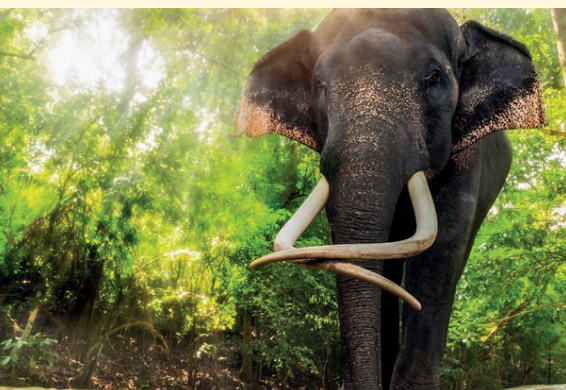
NORTH HILL CITY RESORT, CHIANG MAI

The boutique North Hill City Resort opened in September to offer 42 rooms and easy access to the 18-hole North Hill golf course. Other facilities include meeting rooms, restaurant, business lounge, a spa, a 24-hour fitness room, steam and sauna rooms, a karaoke room and a games room. Guests are also treated to views of the majestic Wat Phra That Doi Suthep.



From top: Ramayana Water Park; The Slate's Tin Mine Restaurant; North Hill City Resort

HOT THEMES



From left: Tour responsibly with EXO Travel Thailand's animal-friendly programmes; whizz through Chiang Mai's lush jungle at Pongyang Zipline & Jungle Coaster; fall in love again at Belmond Napasai

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

The treatment of animals in Thai attractions has been a source of controversy, and elephants are no exception. It is becoming widely accepted that riding the animals bareback is better than carrying tourists in a seat. EXO Travel Thailand, which earned its Travelife certification in early 2016 for responsible tourism and animal welfare policies, has made a point of ensuring the majority of bookings comprise bareback elephant experiences, or attractions where guests do not ride the pachyderms at all.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

Those who fancy zipping through the canopy and seeing eye to eye with rare wildlife are spoiled for choice in Chiang Mai. Eco tours have proliferated, coinciding with a push to make the northern capital a year-round destination.

Flight of the Gibbons boasts the highest, longest and fastest zip lines while contributing to conservation of their namesake, while newcomer Pongyang Zipline & Jungle Coaster features lines up to 800m long plus a jungle coaster that has quickly become popular with all ages.

ROMANTIC MOMENTS

Samui is Thailand's second-largest island but is much less populated than Phuket, allowing a greater chance for seclusion and intimacy. As a honeymoon destination, Samui is only growing in popularity.

The Belmond Napasai is located on a stretch of pure beach along the island's north, with 45 villas, 24 suites and private pool residences designed with romance in mind. The hotel works closely with Asian Trails to offer excursions to mainstream attractions or the island's hidden secrets.



JW MARRIOTT HOTEL BANGKOK

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Bangkok 10110 Thailand



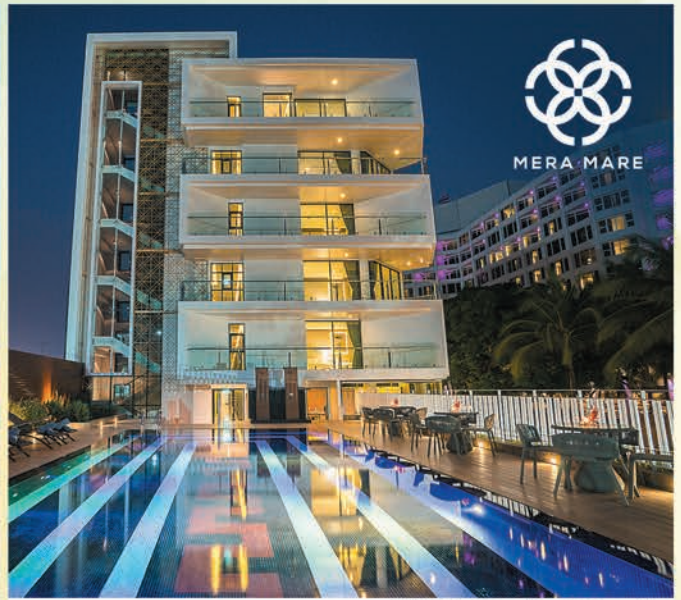
THE KALA

210/8 Moo 4, T.Maret, Koh Samui,
Surat Thani 84310, Thailand



SIAM NIRAMIT BANGKOK

Ratchada Niramit Co., Ltd., 19 Tiamrammit Road,
HuayKwang, Bangkok 10320, Thailand



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Vietnam has seen double-digit percentage growth in international arrivals, thanks to a more welcoming visa policy; Hang Va caves

VIETNAM

By Marissa Carruthers

Vietnam's visa exemption programme is paying off as the country sees a surge in international arrivals. Between January and August, the country welcomed more than 6.45 million travellers, a year-on-year increase of 25.4 per cent, and generated US\$11.83 billion in tourist receipts.

China remained the top source market, with 1.75 million arrivals, followed by South Korea (one million) and Japan (482,300).

In July, a visa exemption was extended by an additional year for tourists from five European countries – the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. The move has seen Italian tourists surge by 31 per cent, Spanish visitors by 27.6 per cent, arrivals from the UK by 22.8 per cent, Germany 17.7 per cent, and France 13.4 per cent.

Encouraged by the result, tour operators are calling for the exemption to be made permanent. Florencia Allo Moreno, general manager of Khiri Vietnam, said: "Travellers from these countries are really interested in Vietnam, and an easy immigration process is always a positive thing."

The latest figures from Vietnam's General Statistic's Office show the country welcomed 899,700 international arrivals during August, a year-on-year increase of 34.4 per cent.

The latest figures also prove positive towards Vietnam hitting its target of 8.5 million foreigners in 2016 – a year-on-year increase of 600,000.

KEY CONTACTS

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www.vietnamtourism.gov.vn; support@vietnamtourism.gov.vn

VIETNAM HOTEL ASSOCIATION
www.vietnamhotel.org.vn; contact@vietnamhotel.org.vn

VIETNAM AIRLINES
www.vietnamairlines.com; contact@vietnamairlines.com

5 KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- ✦ In August, Vietnam began to issue one-year, multiple-entry visas to US citizens for US\$135, up from US\$25 single-entry visas, causing fears that it will negatively impact the market.
- ✦ In September, a series of prime locations in Hanoi were allocated to develop luxury hotels during the next five years to cater to tourism growth.
- ✦ Plans to create a Tourism Development Assistance Fund to improve tourism competency were given the nod in August to boost investment in product development, training and developing human resources.
- ✦ A code of conduct urging tourists to respect culture, dress appropriately and protect the environment was released in August by Nha Trang authorities as part of a beautification sweep.
- ✦ In August, Hanoi authorities extended drinking hours in the historic city from midnight to 02.00 on weekends in a move to make the city more attractive to tourists after dark.

DESTINATION IN NUMBERS

34

/ The year-on-year percentage increase in arrivals from South Korea, thanks to a move that allowed South Koreans to visit Vietnam for up to 15 days visa free.



27.7



/ The percentage increase in foreign arrivals by air to Vietnam in August 2016, spurred by an increase in air connectivity across the country.

9



/ Tourism receipts – in billions of US dollars – Vietnam made between January and August, a 22 per cent year-on-year increase. Officials hope to hit US\$1.6 billion by year-end.



15

/ The number of international tourists – in millions – that Vietnam wants to attract by 2020, boosted by a series of measures, such as increased flights, infrastructure and tourism products.

1,204,560

/ The number of Chinese travellers visiting Vietnam in 1H2016, up 47.9 per cent. Increased flight frequency between the two countries has helped.



PROJECTIONS FOR 2017



“The tourism future is bright with increased scheduled flights from Japan and New Zealand, and chartered flights from surrounding Asian hubs. New projects are being built and enhanced, in anticipation of accommodating those travellers. The rise of secondary destinations also make Vietnam exciting.”

Justin Malcom, general manager, Le Meridien Saigon

“We expect to see stable growth in many areas, especially Phu Quoc and Quy Nhon which we predict to be the new hot spots in 2017. With several new developments and good infrastructure, it’s hard not to have success. Away from the beaches, Mai Chau and Sapa will have sustained growth too.”

Andrew Carroll, global head of sales and marketing, Exotic Voyages



“The US and Australia are always strong source markets for Vietnam. But on the rise are markets such as Germany, one of the countries that got to enjoy visa-free access since last year, and Singapore and Hong Kong due to increased flight frequencies. South Korea has been very healthy because of the increased business interests and cultural exchanges. We expect this to continue.”

Anita Ngai, general manager, Viator Asia Pacific

“Vietnam welcomed more than seven million tourists in the first three quarters of 2016, a 25 per cent increase on arrivals year-on-year. We are expecting this growth to continue given the recent partnership of Vietnam Airlines and All Nippon Airways as well as new routes from Taipei to Hanoi and Kaohsiung to Ho Chi Minh City. These additional flights give tourists from North Asia and China more option for their travel to Vietnam.”

Dang Tran Dinh, country manager – Vietnam, Asiatravel.com Holdings



Hoi An’s heritage town is awash with colourful lanterns whenever the full moon is out

FESTIVALS IN FOCUS

Jan 27-Feb 2, 2017
TET NGUYEN DAN

The Vietnamese New Year, celebrated at the start of the lunar year, is the most important festival in the country. Large firework displays and festivities take place across the country.

Oct 4, 2017
TÉT TRUNG THU

The mid-autumn festival is marked with cheerful gatherings of loved ones, lion dances, fanciful lanterns, and traditional cakes such as *banh deo* and *banh nuong* that are unique to the festival.

Every 14th day of lunar month
HOI AN FULL MOON FESTIVAL

Hoi An’s heritage town becomes a stage for Vietnamese arts, ranging from contemporary to the old, when the full moon appears, drawing both locals and foreigners alike.



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WHAT'S NEW

GRAND HO TRAM STRIP

The integrated resort in Vung Tau has been growing its hardware since its opening in July 2013, with the latest additions emerging in January 2016. New facilities include a 3D cinema, karaoke lounges, retail outlets and the Central Park, a one-hectare attraction that houses an 18-hole miniature golf course, a football field, a basketball court, a pétanque court and more. From 2017, resort will expand further, with plans for a second tower, a residential condotel, a vacation home and a luxury villa on the golf course. Later phases will see additional resorts, including one with an international standard casino

PAN PACIFIC HANOI

Pan Pacific Hotels Group has taken over the former Sofitel Plaza Hanoi and given it a new brand – Pan Pacific Hanoi – along with refurbishments to the lobby, lobby bar, all-day dining restaurant and meeting spaces. Featuring 273 guestrooms and 56 serviced suites, the hotel is close to the historic Old Quarter and offers views across the West Lake and Red River. It is also conveniently located to the business district.

HA LONG OCEAN PARK

With its layout based on the Disneyland model, the US\$267 million Ha Long Ocean Park aims to position the area as a prime regional entertainment hub. The theme park will reflect the rich history and mythology

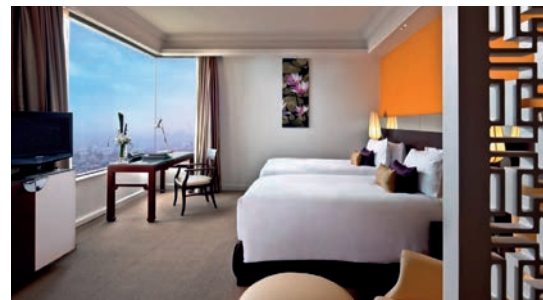
of the Ha Long Bay and will include a 115m giant Ferris wheel, a water park and resort, private beach, commercial buildings and the world's longest free span double-decker cable car. Covering 195-ha in Hong Gai and Bai Chay Wards, the park will open in two phases. The first, which includes the cable car, Ferris wheel, private beach and a portion of the entertainment park, is expected to open by end-2016, with the remainder wrapping up by 2019.

ROYAL LOTUS DANANG

Opened since April 2016, Royal Lotus Danang is helping to position the coastal resort as the country's MICE hub. Situated a three minute stroll from the bustling beach, the hotel boasts Danang's largest conference hall, which can accommodate more than 1,000 people, as well as 192 guestrooms. A fine dining restaurant, sky bar offering 360-degree views of the city and ocean, fitness centre and spa with an outdoor swimming pool can also be found at H&K Hospitality's flagship hotel.

HANG VA, HANG NUOC NUT CAVE TOUR

In April, expedition company Oxalis was given permission to lead tours of the Hang Va and Hang Nuoc Nut caves, which were only discovered in 2002 by locals and are home to stunning stalactites and stalagmites. The trek to the secluded caves takes two days through jungle, mountains, and via river. A night is spent camping there. The tour operates from February to August, and runs three to four times per week for up to eight people per tour.



From top: Grand Ho Tram Strip; Pan Pacific Hanoi; Ha Long Ocean Park

HOT THEMES



From left: Happily discover Vietnam through your belly; seek romantic moments at AVANI Quy Nhon Resort; trek through Vietnam's Central Highlands under the guidance of Khiri Vietnam

GOURMET LURES

Vietnamese food is famous the world over for its freshness, variety and balance of flavours. From the world-famous *pho* and *goi cuon* to *banh mi* and *banh xeo*, its cuisine is tantalising the tastebuds of tourists. From fine dining restaurants to streetside joints, and everything in between, Vietnam is a foodie's heaven. Street Foodies Saigon offers a fun exploration into the city's best street food spots. Saigon Cooking Class gives hands on experience to those wanting to learn how to create the dishes back home.

ROMANTIC MOMENTS

Quy Nhon's location on a mountain-fringed bay overlooking the South China Sea with several islands strewn off the shore, makes it an idyllic paradise. The fact that it remains fairly untouched, with quiet golden sands and crystal clear waters, means it slips under the majority of travellers' radars and is the perfect spot to celebrate a honeymoon or anniversary. AVANI Quy Nhon Resort boasts a vast infinity pool and private, kilometre-long stretch of pristine beach, as well as open air bar and restaurant.

ADVENTURE IN NATURE

The lush green hills of Vietnam's Central Highlands are a great place to get off the beaten track and get lost in nature while discovering the country's diverse culture. Khiri Vietnam offers a special tour taking in the refreshing waterfalls as well as twisting trekking paths that cut through the villages of the ethnic minorities of the Jarai and Bahnar people, who will happily entertain guests with dance and traditional instruments. The Central Highlands is traversed by the famous Ho Chi Minh Trail.



ALA CARTE DANANG BEACH

Duong Dinh Nghe, Phuoc My, Son Tra, Da Nang, Vietnam



BAY HOTEL HO CHI MINH

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FURAMA RESORT DANANG

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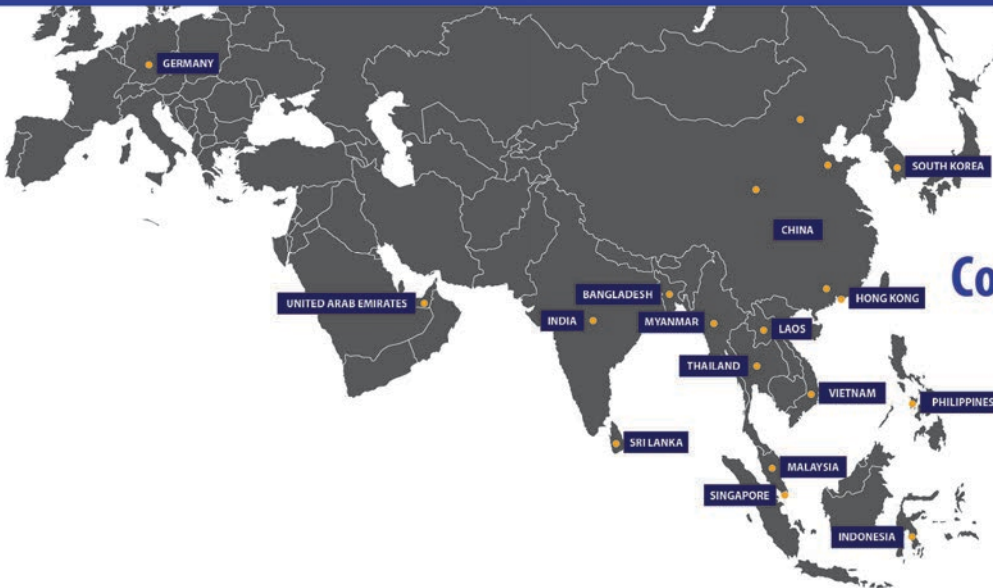
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