

Access spurs alliance

Cambodia, Myanmar in talks for joint promotions stirred by MAI's new deal

By Mimi Hudoyo

FIRST-EVER direct air access between Yangon in Myanmar and Siem Reap in Cambodia is spurring ASEAN tourism cooperation, with the two destinations wasting no time to ink joint promotions to attract international travellers.

Both Myanmar Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB) and Cambodia Tourism Promotion Board are now in talks on how best to maximise their limited promotion budget as a result of Myanmar Airways International's twice-weekly service between Yangon and Siem Reap, to be launched on February 23. The direct service brings closer two



Aung: confident of new service

and Cambodia is nursing a room oversupply.

MTPB marketing committee chairman, Dr Aung Myat Kyaw, said: "Angkor Wat has been attracting millions of travellers while Bagan has more than 300 pagodas to visit. Both will make an excellent combination for

of ASEAN's most veritable heritage sites, Bagan in Myanmar and Angkor Wat in Cambodia, at a time when Myanmar is making a comeback

travellers. We are now discussing with Cambodia on how we can market this together, now that the connection is there."

MTPB meanwhile is promoting the new connection at this ATF, followed by BIT Milan and ITB Berlin. Dr Aung said time was needed to build the longhaul market.

Myanmar Airways International's managing director Aung Gyi said while the target of the flight was local traffic between Myanmar and Cambodia, he was eyeing the South Korean and Japanese travellers to Cambodia, and longhaul travellers who already visit Cambodia and Myanmar.

He said the airline had managed to develop pilgrim traffic between Thailand and Myanmar in the last two years and he was confident that the Yangon-Siem Reap route would be as successful. The twice-weekly services will be served using an A320 with 162 seats. "I expect to get 50 to 60 per cent load factor in the beginning and the service maturing in two years," MAI's Aung said.

Cambodia Hotel Association Siem Reap chapter chairman, Emmett Mc Henry, said: "Additional seat capacity into Siem Reap is what we really need. With more than 4,000 rooms in 3.5 to five-star hotels, there is definitely an oversupply of rooms."

Title tattle

Loo standards

Imagine going anywhere in ASEAN and finding each destination keeping to toilet standards. Did you know an ASEAN public toilet standard is set to be in place by December 2015, as part of the ASEAN tourism strategic plan 2011-2015? The Quality Tourism Working Group, one of the three new working groups (see article below), is in charge and is forming a public toilet standard team.

We are pleasantly surprised that toilets in ASEAN have made it to the masterplan, a reflection that the blueprint may be very comprehensive. For now, however, our pressing problem is finding the toilet in this centre from our press room. After a long search passing narrow alleys, we finally found it.

ASEAN flattens structure to achieve blueprint goal

By Sirima Eamtako

ASEAN's first five-year tourism roadmap is taking off with a leaner and more integrated structure aimed at achieving the blueprint's 86.7 million arrivals goal by 2015.

The ASEAN NTOs' structure has been flattened to three working groups and two committees, from six taskforces and a



Dr Thong Khon: takes time

committee previously. Many ASEAN NTOs interviewed yesterday said the previous taskforces had overlapping mandates and activities, reducing their effectiveness.

Under the new structure, the three working groups are product development headed by Malaysia, marketing and communications led by Thailand and quality led by the Philippines.

Brunei is heading a budget and integration committee while Indonesia heads a tourism professional monitoring committee.

The working groups will meet in Hanoi in April to discuss action and implementation plans, as well as funding, before seeking approval from heads of ASEAN NTOs in June, and subsequently for endorsement from the ASEAN tourism ministers at ATF 2012 in Manado, Indonesia.

"But in the short- to medium-term, Thailand has proposed that some existing activities be pushed into action and not wait until the entire masterplan is endorsed in about a year from now," said Sansern Ngaorungsri, deputy-governor international marketing for Asia and South Pacific of the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

Sources said ASEAN NTOs had approved a budget of US\$50,000 from April to kickstart the roadmap, but that a funding of US\$6 million was needed to see the blueprint to fruition.

Asked where would the funding come from, Cambodia's tourism minister Dr Thong Khon said: "It takes time to talk about the funding."

Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism secretary-general Dato Dr Ong Hong Peng said: "Besides NTOs' funding, there will be discussions in the April meeting in Hanoi on innovative ways (to get) funding."

He said one idea was public and private partnerships.

With an expected growth rate of 25 per cent on visitor arrivals in 2015 based on 65.68 million recorded in 2009, the region is also working to mobilise manpower.

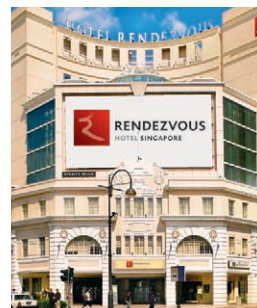
While ASEAN NTOs have been working together for more than 10 years to drive regional tourism development, this is the first time they have a proper five-year plan.

"The (five-year tourism) plan is excellent. The previous plans were a long process and had too many taskforces."

Cambodia tourism minister Dr Thong Khon (above)



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A new wind blowing

Foreign ships are debuting in ASEAN to feed growing demand

By Karen Yue

ASEAN'S waters are seeing an increase in activity with a burgeoning number of western cruise liners sailing into the region.

The 1,300-pax *AIDAaura*, 220-pax *Le Diamant* and 110-pax *Clipper Odyssey* have all made maiden calls at South-east Asian ports over the last three months, bringing the Germans, French and Americans to shore respectively.

Due to stop in Singapore this year are the *Seabourn Sojourn*, Cunard's *Queen Elizabeth*, Silversea's *Silver Spirit* and *Orion II*, while Malaysia is scheduled to receive several calls from P&O's *Artemis* and *Arcadia*, Hapag Lloyd's *Columbus*, *Bremen* and *Europa*, AIDA Cruises' *AIDA-luna* and *AIDAaura*, and Compagnie du Ponant's *Le Ponant*, *Le Diamant* and *L'Mistral*. sFor its next Asian cruise season starting end-2011, AIDA Cruises will also assign a larger ship – its heavy-weight 2,500-pax *AIDAdiva*.

Explaining the cruise influx to the region, Jebson Travel managing director Lim Chee Tong said



Lim: high-spending clients

Australia, which are "big markets" for cruise companies.

"Most of the Asian sailings are long, lasting 10 days or more. Therefore, these cruises will be filled up very early by westerners, who tend to plan their vacations way ahead. They prefer to travel this region by cruise because they will not encounter language difficulties, with everything well taken care of by the cruise line," explained Lim.

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) deputy director, cruise development group, Remy Choo, noted that there had been an increasing cruise throughput in Singapore from foreign cruises.

"Singapore has always been regarded as a marquee port, so

the Far East and South-east Asia regions were two of the most popular winter break-away destinations for tourists from America and

cruise lines that come into this part of Asia will often include a call here," said Choo.

This has also had a positive impact on tourism figures. German arrivals to Singapore were at their highest for the year (24,040) last March, due to two port calls by *AIDAcara*, while Compagnie du Ponant's Asian itinerary "marked a significant opening of the French market to cruising in Asia" and "will bring many first-time French visitors to Singapore", said Darren Tan, managing director of World Express, groundhandler for *Le Diamant*'s port call in Singapore.

The burgeoning trade is also bringing valuable tourism dollars into the region. Average spending per day by passengers on Hapag Lloyd's *Bremen*, for example, is 330 euros (US\$432), according to Lim. "Once a ship docks at a destination, hundreds or thousands of foreigners will spend one full day there," said Lim. "These are affluent travellers...average spending per cruise passenger is higher (than other travellers)."

Numbers that matter

442 The number of buyers attending this year's TRAVEX, from 54 countries. This is up from the 370 buyers from 52 countries at last year's show in Brunei Darussalam.

55 The largest number of buyers is from Asia-Pacific (54.8 per cent), followed by Europe (37.1 per cent), Americas (6.3 per cent), Middle East (1.1 per cent) and others (0.7 per cent).

9 The percentage of buyers from Thailand, the country with the highest buyer representation. Close behind are Singapore (8 per cent), India (8 per cent), Germany (7 per cent), Malaysia (7 per cent) and the UK (7 per cent).

518 The number of booths at this year's TRAVEX. The 10 ASEAN countries are represented by 434 exhibiting companies spread across 8,430m². Last year, in comparison, saw 383 booths and 315 exhibiting companies in a 5,000m² space.

148 The number of media from 32 countries.

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ASEAN agents battle staff shortage

FATA to address manpower crunch with new training courses that mine the region's experts

By Karen Yue

THE Federation of ASEAN Travel Association (FATA) has earmarked human resource (HR) development as one of its key priorities this year to nip the problem of staff poaching in the bud.

FATA president William Tan said: "Everyone of us (FATA members) is facing a shortage of trained staff. As a result, poaching is rampant."

To tackle this, Tan told the *Daily* yesterday that a request for funds had been submitted to the ASEAN Secretariat. "Once the request is approved, we will establish an online training portal that will list all available training courses that travel agencies can apply for. A committee will also be formed (to lead this initiative)."

Courses would be conducted in each ASEAN country and experienced industry practitioners would lead the lessons, said Tan. "Because the travel industries of Malaysia and Singapore are more developed, I expect much of the training leadership to be coming from these two member countries," Tan added.

Mohan Rao Gunti, technology media consultant of Cambodia's IntelliEx Consulting, who contributes to FATA board meetings on technology adoption, agreed that Malaysian and Singaporean

players should share their knowledge in developing hospitality personnel and using technology with developing ASEAN countries.

“ASEAN nations need not depend on tourism experts far away when we have experts sitting right here in this region,”

said Gunti.

Ho Vandy, chairman - steering committee, Cambodia Association of Travel Agents, said the need for training went beyond alleviating the problem of staff shortage. He said: "Cambodia's tourism industry is still very young compared to its ASEAN

neighbours. If the industry does not strengthen its human resource capability fast, it will lose out. We must achieve service standards that match international ones and build language proficiencies among our tourism employees.”

- Hotel HR solution, see page 23

Tracker

An update on key issues and events

UNESCO World Heritage package launched at ATF 2010

THEN Two consortiums comprising Malaysian and Indonesian travel agencies and their respective NTOs launched the UNESCO World Heritage 1-2-3 package promoting Borobudur, Malacca & Penang. The full board seven-day/six-night package targets culture and heritage lovers from China, Japan, Hong Kong, Germany, France, the UK, Italy and Netherlands.

NOW Overseas demand for the product is poor, agents reveal. The general feedback is that the package is too long and costly, with FIT and group travellers unwilling to go through the entire programme, said Malaysian consortium members.

Happy Holidays managing director Tai Poh Kim said poor response from China was due to high ground package costs, with the fee for two pax (twin sharing), excluding airfare, ranging from US\$866 per pax for four-star accommodation to US\$920 for five-star accommodation. Tai said the product was also too niche, appealing only to heritage lovers.

Coordinator of the Malaysian consortium of agents Jessica Koh said the promotion of the package was also left to individual agents, with no concerted effort among the two consortiums to promote or improve the itinerary to make it more saleable.

FUTURE Koh suggested adding new elements to make the package more relevant to the mass market. Consortium members should also work together to make the programme a success – difficult in practice since they compete for the same markets.

UNESCO World Heritage 1-2-3 is likely to die a natural death, with consortium members seemingly uninterested in resuscitating it. — **S. Puvaneswary**



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Encounters to remember

Time to get updated on Phnom Penh's offerings. **Steve Finch** shows you the key spots

[Best shopping experience]

New Collection

What A sprawling two-storey high-end fashion store on Phnom Penh's main shopping street – Sihanouk Boulevard.

Why Shoppers will be spoilt for choice, not to mention be treated like royalty with numerous attentive staff waiting on hand, and refreshments served from a bar after the rewarding legwork.

Contact

Tel (855-12) 852-258

Email jayce@orionworldwide.net



[Best drinking spot]

Metro Café

What A waterfront café that is popular with expats. It has a comfortable air-conditioned interior area and outside terrace ideal for chilling out at Phnom Penh's busy Sisowath Quay.

Why Drinks are inventive and addictive; try the watermelon martini. The food is of very good quality, with mains starting at less than US\$5. The river view is nice too.

Contact

Tel (855-12) 906-706

Contact

Tel (855-12) 751-291

Email dine@riverhousecambodia.com

[Best place to pamper yourself]

Aziadee

What A spa that offers a full range of massages and beauty treatments along with a fine selection of teas.

Why It has a soothing environment and the prices are very reasonable.

Contact

Tel (855-12) 492-854



[Best venue to chill out]

Maxine's (better known as Snow's Bar)

What A great venue for a sundowner, this hang-out is located at the Japanese Friendship Bridge, and has a great ambience that draws the crowd.

Why It is a rickety wooden cabin with old-world charm and a wonderfully breezy verandah that's right on the river – probably the coolest place in Phnom Penh, and the views are unparalleled.

Contact

Tel (855-12) 200-617

[Best value lunch-stop]

Pho 294

What Phnom Penh's most delicious Vietnamese noodle restaurant. Fine food does not come with a big price tag here. Just pay a few dollars a dish for good-quality food.

Why Lunchtime buffets at just a few dollars and the best pho noodles this side of Vietnam make this place an extremely popular spot. Getting a table can be difficult.

Contact

Tel (855-12) 945-528



[Best upscale Khmer dining]

Malis

What A modern Khmer restaurant serving high-end Cambodian cuisine in a plush and cosy environment. Traditional Khmer dishes are given a modern twist with updated recipes.

Why Great food, fine wine and proof that Khmer cuisine can be prepared with sophistication and enjoyed by all without busting the budget.

Contact

Tel (855-23) 221-022

Email luumeng@online.com.kh

[Best place to party]

Riverhouse Lounge

What A charming French colonial building that is now the venue for a trendy club. Frequented by the young and fashionable, the venue has popular DJs that keep partygoers busy on the dance floor, and the bar and intimate verandah area offer quiet moments while looking out to the Tonle Sap River.

Why It's a relaxing place to enjoy a drink before notching up the energy level on the dance floor, where international DJs spin the latest hits.

[Best spot to unwind]

Himawari Leisure Club

What An outdoor pool with a view. Those looking for a dip can also avail themselves of the hot tub and steam room – all at a reasonable all-in-one fee.

Why Not only does the club have one of the best pools in the city, it is also a perfect escape from Phnom Penh's hot and humid weather.

Contact

Tel (855-23) 214-555, ext 881

Email fitnessone@himawari.com.kh

[Best place for culture appreciation]

Meta House

What Located opposite the Phnom Penh Centre on Sot-hearos Boulevard, Meta House is the place to be for great documentaries and art evenings in the Cambodian capital.

Why Film screenings often include question and answer sessions with film-makers, which make this an exciting place to be to engage in the Khmer art scene.

Contact

Tel (855-12) 647-165

Email mesterharm@gmx.net

[Best place to pick up a bottle]

Red Apron

What One of the best-stocked wine shops in Cambodia. It offers a wide variety of international wines, with regular special offers and a tasting gallery for customers to try as much as they want before buying.

Why Great choice of wine and expert service from highly-attentive staff.

Contact

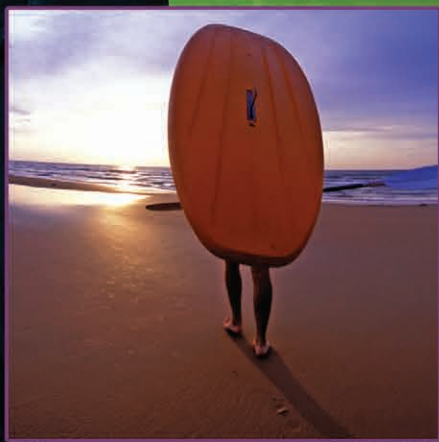
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Opening more doors

Kingdom diversifies its tourism product as 2011 kicks off with ATF, reports **Steve Finch**

NTO The Ministry of Tourism (MOT) is targeting an 11 per cent increase in arrivals this year. Cambodia welcomed 1.6 million visitors in the first eight months of 2010, a 14.6 per cent increase over the same period in 2009.

The MOT will stick to its “Kingdom of Wonder” marketing campaign this year and continue developing the southern coastal cities of Sihanoukville, Kep and Kampot as it attempts to showcase more than just Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

The ministry is trying to convince more cruise ships to call at Sihanoukville Port, while Societe Concessionaire des Aeroports (SCA) is trying to lure more flights to Sihanoukville International Airport, which it operates, through media and agent fam trips.

Access Air France is returning to Cambodia after pulling out in 1974. This will be the country’s first direct air connection with Europe in 37 years.

The French carrier will resume its Paris-Phnom Penh flight via Bangkok on March 27. It will operate thrice weekly on this sec-

tor using a 275-seat Airbus A340 aircraft and will subsequently deploy a 309-seat Boeing B777-200 on the route.

Meanwhile, in November 2010, Air Berlin, through a code-share agreement with Bangkok Airways, activated an online booking facility for its Phnom Penh flights for its passengers in Germany and Scandinavia.

Cambodia’s second-largest market, South Korea, is likewise getting an access boost for the current winter season until March 2011 through Korean Air’s new Siem Reap-Busan weekly service and seven flights a week from Incheon. Asiana Airlines also increased its Incheon-Siem Reap service from four-weekly flights to six a week.

The winter timetable also saw China Southern Airlines adding three flights to its twice-weekly Canton-Siem Reap service and SilkAir bringing its services between Siem Reap and Singapore to nine a week with an extra flight for the season.

AirAsia puts in seven more weekly flights to Phnom Penh for the winter while Malaysia Airlines added two weekly flights to Kuala Lumpur.

On the domestic front, Cam-



“We are happy to see Cambodia evolving into a diverse destination in 2011 and beyond.”

Luu Meng
President
Cambodia Hotel Association

bodia Angkor Air upped its Phnom Penh-Siem Reap frequency from thrice-daily to four times a day.

Hotels The 201-room Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra, which opened in December, was the first five-star international hotel to open in the Cambodian capital in more than 10 years.

Sokha Hotels and Resorts is developing the city’s other new five-star hotel, with 500 to 600 rooms. Opening date has been delayed a number of times though.

Much of the new accommodation projects in the country is concentrated in the Sihanoukville, Kep and Kampot coastal resorts.

The Sokha group is developing Sokha O’Chheuteal Beach & Casino in Sihanoukville and Sokha Boko mega-resort near Kampot, opening in 2012. A Japanese investor is developing the Emario mixed-use complex in Sihanoukville, which is scheduled to open this year.

Islands off the coast of Sihanoukville will further enhance Cambodia’s tourist appeal. The town’s newly-renovated airport

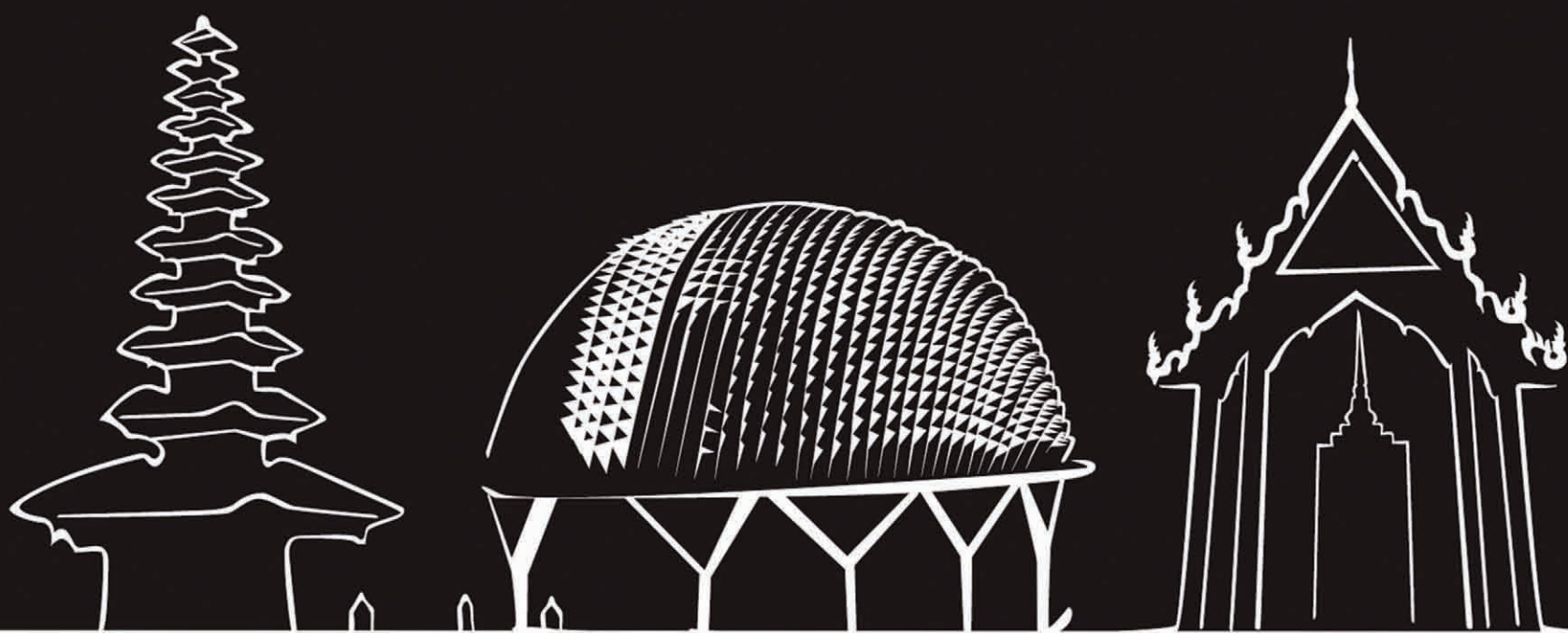
will start servicing scheduled flights this year. The 25-villa Song Saa resort, some 30 minutes by boat from Sihanoukville, will open by year-end. Kep is also set to welcome more guesthouses and hotels this year.

Rates According to the Cambodia Hotel Association (CHA), occupancy levels this year are to hover between 55 and 65 per cent, roughly the same as in the last two years despite additional supply, particularly in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville.

But Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra general manager Didier Lamoot was confident occupancy rates would rise this year. “We were already recovering in 2010, compared to 2008 and 2009. There is no reason we shouldn’t do the same in 2011,” he said.

Om Som Sun, general manager of Mekong Heritage Travel, likewise expected a modest increase in occupancy this year.

CHA forecasts rates of US\$35 for one- and two-star properties this year, US\$45 to US\$75 for three- and four-star hotels, and US\$110 to US\$150 for five-star properties. – **Additional reporting by Sirima Eamtako**



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Products

Luxury, history and leisure combine to create new tourist offerings

Chi Pat Ecolodge
What Built close to the water in the small village of Chi Pat in Koh Kong Province, already the site of the Community-based Ecotourism initiative by Wildlife Alliance, this new ecolodge has seen construction stalled a number of times but is now tipped to open this year or next. It will offer high-end bungalows in a remote, picturesque setting in the Cardamom Mountains, an area that is home to a host of wildlife. The site is accessible by boat from nearby Andoung Tek, a journey that can take up to two hours, depending on the class of boat.
Contact
Website www.wildlifealliance.org

Diamond Island Ice Rink
What Cambodia's first ice rink, opening end-2010/early 2011, will be located at the up-and-coming Koh Pich or Diamond



Island. This is part of a series of new attractions on what has become one of Phnom Penh's most popular leisure destinations, particularly among locals. The ice rink is being constructed with the help of Chinese technology by Overseas Cambodia Investment Corporation, the owner of this expansive riverside plot that also houses

a series of wedding halls. There are also plans to build a "ghost house" attraction next to the ice rink as part of an expanding entertainment complex.
Diamond Island Night Market
What Launching end-2010/early 2011, Diamond Island Night Market is set to compete directly with Phnom Penh's only

other night market on Sisowath Quay. It is being developed by Overseas Cambodia Investment Corporation, which at press time had already agreed to rent out all 108 stalls. The developer has also signed up a number of international and local fastfood chains set to open within the new market, including KFC, The Pizza Company and BB World.

Water Park complex
What Scheduled to open in 2012, this entertainment complex in Siem Reap will feature an 18-hole golf course along with a casino and shopping centre. South Korean company Intercity Group started work on the complex last October and plans to attract Chinese and Asian visitors. The casino will be the first in Siem Reap and only the second, after Naga World in Phnom Penh, to be built away from Cambodia's borders – the

government has confined gaming centres mostly to the country's frontiers with Thailand and Vietnam.
Contact
Website www.angkorpark.com
Anlong Veng Khmer Rouge sites
What Capitalising on the popularity of attractions that offer insights into the genocidal Khmer Rouge (KR) regime and Cambodia's history, the government plans to develop the former KR stronghold of Anlong Veng into a full-fledged tourism destination by refurbishing 21 homes that belonged to members of the regime. Just 90 minutes from Siem Reap, Anlong Veng was the hometown of key KR cadres, including former head of state Khieu Samphan and Ta Mok, a former member of the central committee whose former compound is currently an attraction.

My choices

Cambodia

Compiled by Sirima Eamtako

What is your biggest challenge in 2011?

Has ASEAN taken off as a single destination?

Which ASEAN destination, apart from yours, are you most impressed with and why?



Olivier Marchesin
General manager
Exotissimo Cambodia

The fast pace and dynamism of the industry make it hard to predict what may be around the corner, but we hope 2011 will be quieter when it comes to external events and give us time to focus 100 per cent on continuing to grow, develop and improve the business. On the other hand, challenges are always a motivator to develop more projects, create more ideas and look for new and emerging markets, as well as develop new marketing tools.

ASEAN is nowhere near close to being recognised as a single destination, and by no means should be. The region is too big and diverse, and the ASEAN countries have incredibly varied cultures and heritages. Each country is – and should be – viewed as an independent destination, and should complement its neighbours. I believe this is how the region should be considered. If people perceive ASEAN as a single destination, they may only ever visit once. We now have six destinations in Exotissimo and are continually creating new products and experiences in each of them. But we also produce fantastic combination itineraries that give clients the option of either one destination as a stand-alone experience or a regional ASEAN trip.

Myanmar – it is one of the most impressive countries in the region as it still retains a sense of mystery. People are hesitant to visit, but the potential for development is incredible. There are still countless barriers that currently limit and control this explosion, but it will happen. The feedback from our clients visiting Myanmar is unanimous. For many, it is their favourite destination in the region.



Didier Lamoot
General manager
Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra

Our ambition is to become the benchmark in the luxury hotel market in Phnom Penh. There are so many things to say in terms of challenges in 2011 – to arrive on the scene with 100 per cent in service and consistency from day one after just opening and with a new workforce of 450 employees. We are spending two months on full training and really want to combine the Cambodian *savoir d'être* (adaptability) with the experience and skills of international employees at Sofitel.

I will believe that ASEAN can be a single destination if I see improvements in the visa situation for travel between member countries. I think that a few years from now, the borders in ASEAN will open and we can create a "Schengen space" in the region.

Singapore is a good reference because it is a major market but is still fighting (ie, does not rest on its laurels). Singapore's open-skies policy is fantastic. It is also very easy to get visas. These things make it convenient to go to Singapore. The city is also a great destination for MICE.



Pham Ngoc Minh
CEO
Vietnam Airlines

N/A

ASEAN countries share many distinctions and commonalities in culture, history, landscape and lifestyle. Additionally, we have a strong connection to each other in terms of history and geography. These factors encourage travellers to discover ASEAN as a single destination. A lot of effort has been made recently at different levels to make this a reality. ASEAN tourism ministers agreed to make the region a single destination in January 2005. After that, an agreement on visa exemption for ASEAN citizens was signed at the 39th ASEAN Management Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, making travel between ASEAN countries easier than before.

If I were a foreigner who wanted to discover the wonders of Asia, the best choice would be the Indochina region, including Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Sun Sodavy

Housekeeping
Allson Angkor
Siem Reap, Cambodia

Nothing makes her happier
than a clean, tidy room.

Do Thi Ngoc

Front Office Receptionist
Sunway Hotel Hanoi
Vietnam

Assist in checking in our
3,426th guest today.

Ker Sokunthea

Executive Chef
Sunway Hotel Phnom Penh
Cambodia

Ensuring the freshness of
ingredients for all dishes.

Sunil

Bellman
Sunway Resort Hotel & Spa
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Shy personality but physically
strong. Handles 827kg of
luggage daily.

Li Ting

Chinese Restaurant Host
Sunway Golden Diamond Hotel
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CAMBODIA

CHINA

INDONESIA

MALAYSIA

VIETNAM

Icebreaker

Strike a lucrative deal with these newcomers to ASEAN Tourism Forum. Compiled by Gracia Chiang



Jayesh Ashar
Executive director
Pearl Travels
India

What do you do? Pearl Travels is a global B2B online wholesaler for land arrangements. We specialise in FIT tailor-made itineraries and MICE. Our main markets are the Middle East, India, the UK and North America.

What are you looking for at ATF 2011? New destinations, products, suppliers and partners in the ASEAN region. We are in the process of creating a global network of like-minded DMCs and tour operators who will share a common e-commerce platform. I hope to identify a few partners at ATF as the ASEAN region is extremely important to us in this project.

What do you like about buying travel? The travel sector is always exciting and there's always something new to learn. Even after 20 years in the business, I am surprised by how much more there is to learn. As buyers, we get treated extremely well and that

gives us a good feeling. But we do carry the responsibility of professional conduct while enjoying this hospitality.

What is the hardest thing about buying travel? Trends change regularly and it is a challenge to keep abreast of all the exotic products and destinations that are being introduced. For this, I depend on well-organised trade-shows and good, informative and unbiased trade magazines.

How can sellers get your attention and impress you? I prefer good, clean booths where the sellers offer one-to-one attention and go straight to the point in introducing their products with

plenty of honest images. Sellers should be honest about the markets they have access to and wish to access. The B2B buyer-seller relationship is a partnership of sorts where we have a mutual interest in promoting a product or destination.

What upsets you most about sellers and/or travel trade-shows? Sellers with dirty and cluttered booths and preset or prejudiced mindsets about a buyer or a market. Tradeshow that do not allow enough time for the buyer to wander the aisles and explore products that may not have caught their attention during the setting of appointments prior to the show.

What is the best destination you've ever been to and why? Thailand! It has a wide choice of landscapes from city to beach and hills that a tour operator can sell. The citizens and the economy are also very tourist- and travel industry-friendly.

What is the easiest travel destination to sell and why? Thailand again. It offers great value for money, a wide choice of cuisine, bars, entertainment and shopping. Its luxury hotels are extremely affordable.

What is the one destination you'd like to visit but never had the chance to and why? Langkawi, Maldives and Mauritius.



Melissa Reijnders
Product manager
333TRAVEL
The Netherlands

What do you do? I'm the product manager for 333TRAVEL, a direct seller specialising in roundtrips and tailor-made programmes in Asia.

What are you looking for at ATF 2011? My main focus will be Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. I am looking for updates on these destinations and new interesting products – not just mainstream ones but also those that explore lesser-known areas. I'm also interested in accommodations that stand out, such as those that are trendy, unique or have fantastic locations that promise a memorable stay.

What do you like about buying travel? Buying travel is different every year. Demands change all the time, as do destinations and circumstances, so it is always challenging and exciting.

What is the hardest thing about buying travel? Being ahead. Not following the rest but anticipating what the market wants and choosing the right products. Another difficulty is offering the products at the right price, since price competition is very strong at the moment.

How can sellers get your attention and impress you? By really working with me to create the best experience for the client. Some sellers have impressed me by listening closely to what I was looking for and creating that product especially for our clients. Others added tailor-made extras. This makes clients feel special and improves their experience.

What upsets you most about sellers and/or travel trade-shows? Most sellers are great to work with but some do not listen to the market and their longtime partners and focus only on maximising profits with short-term plans. They are hard to work with. It'd also be good if tradeshow with an appointment schedule still allow time for buyers and sellers to walk around. That is when you sometimes see the most interesting things and meet interesting companies and people.

What is the best destination you've ever been to and why? That is a difficult one since I love every country I've visited so far! I think Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam would be in my top three list. These countries have given me some unforgettable experiences and made me want to go back again and again. They offer great varieties in landscapes, beautiful nature, amazing history and cultural heritage. Plus, the people are amazing.

What is the easiest travel destination to sell and why? Thailand and Indonesia. These countries are well-known, easily accessible and people often know what they want to visit there. It's a pity these destinations have had to endure some disasters in the last few years.

What is the one destination you'd like to visit but never had the chance to? Myanmar. I can't wait to meet the people, get to know more about its culture and see its beautiful places.



Eric Moris
Managing director
Business Pass Travel & Incentive Co.
Belgium

What do you do? We're a B2B travel and incentive organiser. We create tailor-made programmes for our clients and offer an unforgettable experience where guests take in the highlights of the destination yet discover how locals lead their daily lives. They also get a taste of the local gastronomy during their stay.

What are you looking for at ATF 2011? Cambodia is currently not in our portfolio. I'm looking for trustworthy and professional partners to support our land arrangements.

What do you like about buying travel? The ability to let clients discover new destinations.

What is the hardest thing about buying travel? Finding a local partner that can make a difference by not offering "copy and paste" products.

How can sellers get your attention and impress you? Presenting venues and special locations that are unique and will be a privilege for my guests, and by knowing their destinations as well as I know my country.

What upsets you most about sellers and/or travel trade-shows? Passive ways of presenting or proposing a destination and the lack of uniqueness. Some sellers do not make the effort to know our market and thus cannot present what is unique in the destination.

What is the best destination you've ever been to and why? Myanmar because of how our local DMC prepared our programme. It succeeded in combining the "Must of Myanmar" highlights with the local daily life and customs. The programme was an interactive and enjoyable discovery that got clients involved.

What is the easiest travel destination to sell and why? For short-haul, Barcelona, because of the supportive marketing by the Spanish tourism board and the city of Barcelona. The destination evokes an expectation that can be fulfilled. Gastronomy is of high quality but affordable. For long-haul, New York, because there is continuous interest generated by the news and there is always something going on. You can also always find a decent solution for every budget.

What is the one destination you'd like to visit but never had the chance to? Due to my limited knowledge of Bhutan, I am curious to know what is possible and how I can incorporate the country in our portfolio. I imagine Bhutan to be a serene, mountain kingdom, untouched by modernity and retaining its old-world charm.



Philippe Roussel
Product manager
Asie Voyages
France

What do you do? My company sells Asian travel through a dedicated website, www.asie-voyages.com.

What are you looking for at ATF 2011? New suppliers and new ideas.

What do you like about buying travel? Being able to introduce new destinations and travel offers to our clients.

What is the hardest thing about buying travel? Not enough information is being given in French so it takes a long time to translate the many interesting offerings.

How can sellers get your attention and impress you? By offering good quality and good prices, not complaining, and handing out programmes in French.

What upsets you most about sellers and/or travel trade-shows? Not receiving prices and programmes that sellers promise to send after the fair.

What is the best destination you've ever been to and why? Thailand because it is the land of smiles!

What is the easiest travel destination to sell and why? Thailand. It has cheap prices and very good quality.

What is the one destination you'd like to visit but never had the chance to and why? Myanmar. I haven't had enough time to visit.

"Sellers should be honest about the markets they have access to and wish to access. (Sellers) with preset or prejudiced mindsets about a buyer or a market (upset me)."

Jayesh Ashar
Executive director
Pearl Travels
India

REVVING UP MALAYSIA'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

Malaysia is recognised as one of the world's leading tourism destinations. Last year, Malaysia ranked among the top 10 countries with the highest international tourist arrivals and top 15 in global receipts.

The tourism industry is an important contributor to Malaysia's economy, generating RM36.9 billion (USD11.7 billion) in gross national income (GNI) in 2009. This makes tourism the fifth largest industry in the country's economy after oil, gas and energy; financial services; wholesale and retail; and palm oil.

The tourism sector will continue to be in the forefront of Malaysia's economic development. This sustainable and high-yield sector will continue to drive Malaysia's economy, providing income and job opportunities.

Realising the advantage and strong position the country possesses in the tourism industry globally, the Government is committed to further develop this sector together with the private sector.

The tourism industry has been recognised as one of the 12 National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) in the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), which is part of the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) under the 10th Malaysia Plan (2011-2015). It is the first detailed programme by the government designed to make Malaysia a high income nation by the year 2020.

The tourism industry aims to raise its contribution to the Gross National Income (GNI) to RM103.6 billion by 2020 through 12 entry point projects (EPPs) and three business opportunities. This would require the sector to deliver a RM66.7 billion incremental in GNI, tripling its GNI from RM36.9 billion in 2009.

Through the Economic Transformation Programme, the Malaysian Government targets and aspires to see a growth in tourist arrivals, from 24 million in 2009 to 36 million in 2020, while tourist receipts are set to increase from RM53 billion (2009) to RM168 billion (2020). In terms of yield (receipts per arrival), it is expected to grow from RM2,260 (2009) to RM4,675 (2020).

The 12 EPPs are developed across five broad themes to create an additional 497,200 jobs within 10 years. They cater to different segments of tourists ranging from avid shopper to nature lover and the business traveller as well as families on vacation.



The five themes comprise affordable luxury; nature adventure; family fun; events, entertainment, spa and sports; and business tourism.

Declaring Malaysia as a global biodiversity hub and positioning the country as a duty-free shopping destination for tourist goods are among the EPPs expected to deliver significant results in the industry within a 10-year time frame.

The other EPPs are developing the world's first eco-nature integrated resort in Sabah, designating KLCC-Bukit Bintang as a vibrant shopping precinct and establishing three new premium outlets in Malaysia.

There are also plans to create a Straits Riviera; more international events; establish dedicated entertainment zones; develop local expertise and regulate

the spa industry; establish Malaysia as a leading business tourism destination; improve rates, mix and quality of hotels; and enhance connectivity to priority medium-haul markets.

In addition to the 12 high-impact EPPs, the Government has also identified three business opportunities, which will support the growth of the tourism industry. The three business opportunities are focused

on food and beverage outlets, local transportation and tour operators.

For more details on the ETP, kindly refer to the 'Economic Transformation Programme – A Roadmap For Malaysia', which is available at leading bookstores in Malaysia. For a listing of stores and to download soft copies of the book, please visit www.pemandu.gov.my.

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welcome to Bhuvana My Spa

Best Western's exclusive in-house spa brand, Bhuvana My Spa has been specially conceived by leading experts in the international spa industry to create an expandable series of unique spas that blend the best of their localities with the world-class standards of treatments and services - a spiritual and emotional experience offering of signature spa therapies and treatments drawn from the exotic ancient cultures and traditions combined with modern expertise.



The Logic

As modern people have become acutely aware of the role of health in their lifestyles, they have become increasingly avid customers of spas. Many find that the services do not live up to their expectations or the spa programs are simply overcharged as they are continuing their search for effective treatments at friendly prices.

Thus our Bhuvana spa business represents an international investment opportunity that, with its relatively modest capital requirements relative to the revenue, offers an attractive return on investment while enhancing the image and overall attractiveness of their host hotels and resorts.

The Root

The word "Bhuvana" is derived from the Balinese and Sanskrit words for "Earth" and "Universe". Thus the signature inspiration of all Bhuvana is the essence of the universe with an automatic indivisible association with the complementary concepts of good health and harmony with nature.



The Concept

Every Bhuvana experience is unique as it brings into its treatment menu a therapy inspired by the Oriental traditional practices of the locality. Infusing earth elements with the use of essential oils and specialized skills, the Bhuvana therapy is meticulously designed to bring guests in touch with all their senses through simple and affordable services. The therapeutic experience begins the moment you step inside.

The services

Bhuvana spa management services comprise a one-stop service for the spa developer. Bhuvana spa is exclusively for Best Western and Best Western Premier hotels only. We are able to assist you from concept development to interior decoration, procurement, recruitment, training and spa operations. Our dedicated team of experts is thoroughly experienced in spa management and will provide full spa consultancy services to help you maximize your profitability while keeping your guests happy and always wishing to come back to the unique experience of your spa.

Newly opened is the Bhuvana My Spa at Best Western Premier Signature Pattaya. This inspirational haven of health and wellbeing offers six spa treatment rooms and a Foot Reflexology section, with an extensive menu of massage, face and body treatments to choose from. These range from the Bhuvana Signature Massage – a combination of techniques exclusively designed for each Bhuvana to produce ultimate relaxation, Traditional Thai and Back and Shoulder Massages, to the Revitalizing Facial, Green Tea Scrub and signature Exotic Herbal Salt Scrub. True to the Bhuvana My Spa experience, this is where ultimate relaxation of mind, body and spirit is achieved.



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PLUS





On an upswing tempo

Marketing and development plans smooth the way for tourism growth. By **Mimi Hudoyo**

NTO Indonesia is concentrating this year on intensifying programmes introduced in key markets over the last two years.

Sapta Nirwandar, director general of marketing of the Indonesian Ministry of Culture and Tourism, said: "We set up the market focus and strategy in the last couple of years. We also appointed representatives who are hands-on in the markets where we want to grow. It is now time to intensify the marketing and promotions in these markets."

At press time, the directorate general was finalising the 2011 programmes for each market, with plans to increase participation in major travel fairs and roadshows as well as travel fairs at malls, cultural performances and product exhibitions.

A marketing budget of 492 billion rupiah (US\$54.66 million) has been allocated this year, with an arrivals target of 7.6 million visitors generating US\$7.6 billion in tourism receipts.

While ASEAN and Australia are leading markets that look set to continue their growth trends in 2011, the Middle East, India and Taiwan are expected to show significant growth. Growth from Ja-

pan and South Korea is expected to slow down as these countries are still reeling from the impact of the global economic crisis.

Access With air traffic outgrowing airport capacity, a number of cities in Indonesia are either expanding existing airports or developing new ones.

Lombok International Airport, originally scheduled to open end-2010, is now due for an early-2011 debut. West Nusa Tenggara governor Muhammad Zainul Majdi said the delay was due to the extension of the new 2,500m runway by another 250m to accommodate Boeing B767 and B747-400 and Airbus A320 aircraft. The highway connecting the airport and Mataram city centre is also under construction.

Bandung's Husein Sastranegara Airport is also expected to have a new runway to accommodate Airbus A320 aircraft. The Angkasa Pura II airport authority has allotted some US\$4.4 million for the project, to be completed by March 2011.

In Medan, the US\$366.7 million development of Kuala Namu International Airport is sched-



"Demand for Indonesia, especially Bali, will continue to be good. We're seeing emerging markets like Turkey and Iran. But Bali's traffic congestion has caused us to remove some itineraries from the programme."

Justina Puspawati
Managing director
Smiling Tours

uled for completion in 2012.

Hotels Indonesia is seeing a growth spurt in hotel projects, particularly in the budget and three-star categories. The influx of rooms is not limited to Jakarta and Bali but also extends to various regions from Sumatera to Papua.

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts will open 19 hotels this year, the majority of which are Amaris, its budget brand. In 2010, the group added 1,332 rooms, mainly from budget hotels.

Tauzia Hotel Management, which operates Harris Hotels & Resorts, has launched its budget brand, POP Hotel, in Bali. Seven more POP properties are under construction in various locations, with openings scheduled between 2010 and 2012.

Meanwhile, Accor is pushing its All Seasons economy brand, and Aston International has a number of Fave Hotel and Quest properties due to open this year and next.

But not all the action is at the low end of the market. Swiss-Belhotel is adding seven hotels in the four- and five-star categories until 2012. The Seminyak in Bali,

targeted for a soft launch this March, has been rebuilt into a luxury property, while W Retreat & Spa Seminyak is expected to open in February.

Aston International also recently launched its upmarket boutique brand, Royal Kamuela, in Bali.

Rates Hotels are poised to increase rates between 10 and 15 per cent this year, with a couple of hotels raising tariffs by as much as 30 per cent.

Pacto managing director Susilowani Daud said: "Hoteliers are being sensible and are increasing rates reasonably for 2011."

According to Smiling Tours managing director Justina Puspawati, the proposed rate hikes were not really an "increase in rupiah terms" as the currency had strengthened against the US dollar. Some hotels have also renovated and upgraded their products and were thus justified in adjusting rates.

"What I do not like, though, is that some hotels that had submitted their proposed rates for 2011 suddenly sent revisions after seeing that demand was higher than expected," Puspawati said.

My choices

Indonesia

Compiled by Mimi Hudoyo



Jero Wacik
Minister of Culture and Tourism
Indonesia

The year presents a big opportunity for Indonesia's MICE industry, as two ASEAN Summits and other ministers' meetings will be held here. My challenge will be to make sure they all run well and smoothly, and benefit major destinations as well as emerging ones.

Most ASEAN member countries have developed their tourism industries well. It is not only the major countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand that have become popular destinations. Even Vietnam and Cambodia are gaining in popularity. ASEAN as a whole, however, is not identified as a destination by travellers. They would still want to go to specific cities and countries.

Vietnam. The country has managed to set a good development strategy and has executed it well. As a result, it has shown rapid development in tourism.



Masri
General manager
Sheraton Senggigi Beach Resort, Lombok

The biggest challenge for me is to play a part in getting Lombok on the international map. We have seen growing interest from regional and domestic markets in the last couple of years. Tourists from China and Russia have been visiting Lombok and the resort.

Yes, I think so. The fact that international travellers are visiting a number of countries in a single trip attests to this. Moreover, it is not only the major countries but also the "young" countries that are growing.

Singapore and Malaysia. I am impressed with the way they promote themselves. They are not only very serious in doing their marketing and promotions, but they are also creative in packaging and creating new products.



Sebastian Ng
Managing director
Incito Tours, Makassar

My biggest challenge is to expand my travel agency by having an online presence and winning the confidence of travellers who may have been deterred by fraudulent OTAs. It is crucial for us to go online as more travellers are planning their holidays via the Internet.

No, unfortunately not. ASEAN has come up with various efforts like image promotion and products like Visit ASEAN Pass, but travellers seem to know countries within the group rather than the group itself.

I'm impressed with Vietnam. It is an attractive country with historical sites, nature and culture. It is interesting to see how its tourism has grown so quickly. Besides, Vietnam truly offers value for money.



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Pha That Luang, Vientiane

Going the distance

Laos shines its software as it gears up for regional events, writes **Bernie Rosenbloom**

NTO Sticking to the “Laos, Simply Beautiful” brand, the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA) is targeting 2.22 million arrivals and US\$289 million in tourism revenue this year.

“LNTA aims to attract more longhaul visitors, especially from France, the UK, Germany, the Americas, Australia and Japan,” said Vang Rattanavong, LNTA’s vice chairman.

He added that LNTA planned to participate in more travel trade shows, improve its website and work more closely with the media, while continuing to focus on improving Laos’ cultural and natural attractions.

The NTO’s agenda includes solidifying plans for hosting the Mekong Tourism Forum 2011, Visit Laos Year 2012 and ASEAN Tourism Forum 2013. Rattanavong said discussions were ongoing over the budget and specific activities for Visit Laos Year.

The LNTA has teamed up with the Ministry of Education to establish the Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality, scheduled for a 2012 debut, in a bid to develop the country’s hospitality sector and upgrade the quality of human resources.

Hotels Supply in Vientiane and Luang Prabang is said to centre on quality rather than quantity, although tour operators are already complaining of a guesthouse glut.

“We know what the high-end (market) and backpackers want, but what about the middle (market)? We need more value-for-money properties,” said Ansara Hotel Vientiane sales and marketing director Laurent Granier.

He noted that Laos could not increase its room supply as there were not enough direct longhaul flights servicing the country. “Until there are more routes, there is no need for more hotels,” Granier explained.

Philippe Conod, Asian Trails Laos’ managing director, was content with the room supply. “The hardware is there and in good locations, but there is a lack of service quality among the staff at all levels,” he said.

Meanwhile, Luang Prabang is witnessing an increase in top-end inventory. The 23-suite Alila Luang Prabang opened in October 2010. Luangsay Residence, Le Palais Juliana and Shinta Mani are poised to come online early this year.



“Laos is opening up fast, and well-established DMCs need to stay ahead of the game. Discerning clients are looking for more than just standard packages, something that can’t be found in guidebooks and on the Internet.”

Henry Fenner
General manager
Exotissimo Travel Laos

Access Lao Airlines is expanding its regional frequencies. Planning director Noudeng Chanthaphasouk said the national carrier planned to increase frequency of its Luang Prabang-Siem Reap service from three- to five-weekly flights and its Luang Prabang-Hanoi service from four to seven flights a week. It also intends to connect to Kunming and Houei Xay, adjacent to Thailand’s Chiang Mai Province.

On the hardware front, Pakse International Airport completed its runway extension project in mid-2010, and the facility is now ready for regional traffic. Pakse will host the Mekong Tourism Forum in May 2011.

Construction of Luang Prabang airport’s new terminal and 3,000m runway is ongoing for a 2013 completion. LNTA’s Rattanavong said the airport upgrade and longer runway should attract larger planes from Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, and possibly lure airlines from China, Malaysia and Singapore.

Rates Pressure from new properties should stabilise room rates in 2011, after a spate

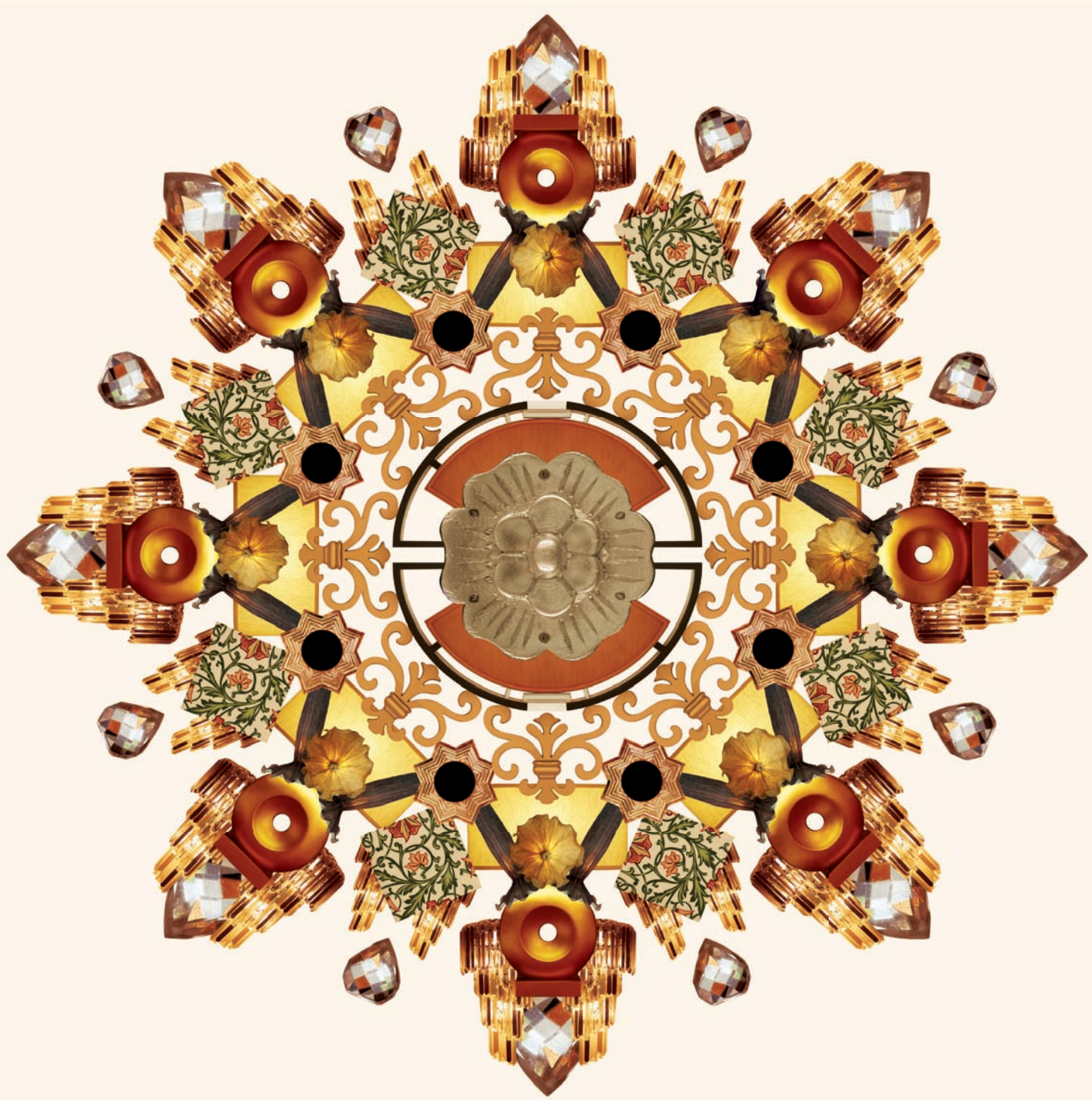
of increases over five years.

Asian Trails’ Canod said Luang Prabang had witnessed an increase in inventory, which was expected to lead to stronger competition and probably put pressure on rates. He added that two new centrally-located boutique hotels in Vientiane would also put more pressure on leaders such as the Settha Palace.

Ansara’s Granier said rates were difficult to predict due to the weakening US dollar. Hotels could maintain rates but needed to find alternative sources of revenue such as F&B sales and higher occupancies. “Boutique rooms in the US\$100 range are currently a narrow niche in Vientiane, with competition coming from hotels in the US\$60 to US\$80 range,” he said.

According to LNTA, hotels in Vientiane and Luang Prabang recorded average occupancy rates of 63 per cent and 68 per cent respectively in 2009. A similar figure is expected for Vientiane in 2011, while Luang Prabang is expected to hit 75 per cent. But the NTO notes that these figures include guesthouses, which constituted the bulk of the room supply and tended to have occupancies of less than 40 per cent.

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Chao Anouvong Park

Chao Anouvong Park

What Workers are putting the finishing touches to the 3km-long, 14.5-hectare Chao Anouvong Park, which runs along central Vientiane’s Mekong River embankment. The park is due for completion early this year.

The landscaped promenade, with large, grassy picnic areas and recreational zones, can hold events that seat 4,000 people. It will serve as the main viewing point for the annual Mekong Boat Racing Festival held every

October at the conclusion of Buddhist Lent.

The park is named after Chao Anouvong, Vientiane’s king from 1767 to 1835, and will include a statue of the revered monarch. The project also includes a substantial dyke to protect Vientiane from the annual threat of flooding.

Contact

Website www.tourismlaos.com

Sayabouly Elephant Sanctuary

What Due to soft open in February, the 100-hectare Sayabouly Elephant Sanctuary will be fully completed by late 2013.

Located on the banks of the Nam Tien Reservoir in Sayabouly Town, around 100km south of Luang Prabang, the sanctuary is being developed by Elefant-Asia Laos, a non-profit organisation dedicated to protecting Lao elephants.

The project entails a professional mahout school, an elephant breeding and nursery centre, a research and care unit as well as bungalow-style accommodation, a dormitory and a restaurant/bar.

The sanctuary will offer a six-day mahout training package, as well as soft adventure activities such as elephant trekking, sessions to observe elephant training, canoeing on the reservoir, and mountain biking around the grounds. Also available are an observation tower and a museum to learn and watch films about elephants.

Sayabouly is home to 75 per cent of Lao’s 500 or so domesticated elephants and has one of the country’s largest wild elephant populations at approximately 100 to 150.

Contact

Website www.elefantasia.org

Nam Eng Cave

What Now open for tourists, Nam Eng Cave is among the longest mapped underground labyrinths in northern Laos. Located on Lao Route 3, about 46km south of Luang Namtha Town, the subterranean system includes fairly well-lit “wet” and “dry” caves.

Limestone columns serve as geological gateways to chambers unveiling gours (dry floor pools) and stone-rimmed wet pools

with cave pearls. The network is generally narrow but easily passable, and acts as a natural air-conditioning system.

The 30-hectare Nam Eng Cave area is currently being



Nam Eng Cave

developed by the Lao National Tourism Administration, backed by the Asian Development Bank’s Sustainable Tourism Development Project, to include a small roadside market and better lighting and interpreted walkways inside the caves. These are due for completion in 2012. A restaurant and a nature resort are also being considered.

Contact

Website www.stdplaos.com

Fort Carnot

What The 110-year-old hilltop Fort Carnot is being restored and is expected to be returned to its former glory by next year.

The site is located in Houei Xay town, Bokeo province, overlooking the popular Mekong border crossing to Chiang Khong, Thailand.

Built in 1900, Fort Carnot, colonial France’s westernmost Indochinese stronghold, is among the best-preserved colonial military outposts in Laos.

The eastern rampart’s barracks and main gate remain intact, as do its corner bastions, with tunnels leading soldiers to watchtowers outside the fort.

The long room along the southern barricade has slits for riflemen aiming at the Mekong. The north block, being developed into a museum, most likely held the kitchen and jail.

The project is led by the Lao National Tourism Administration with support from the Asian Development Bank’s Sustainable Tourism Development Project.

Contact

Website www.stdplaos.com

My choices

Laos

Compiled by
Bernie Rosenbloom



Vang Rattanaavong
Vice chairman
Lao National Tourism Administration

Our biggest challenge is preparing for Visit Laos Year 2012 and the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2013. Also, 2011’s Party Congress will implement many changes, so we will be coming up with the next five-year plan. (The Lao People’s Revolutionary Party, which rules the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, meets twice a year to discuss solutions for proposed legislation.)



Nataly Wanhoff
Managing director
Diethelm Travel Laos

To highlight the biggest challenge is difficult; it is more a combination of issues, which are of importance to ensure a sustainable growth of tourist arrivals into Laos in 2011.

The number of quality hotel developments that have opened and are due to open is putting pressure on the hospitality workforce.



Thomas Pillai
General manager
Settha Palace Hotel

Our biggest challenge is to fill more rooms as we face more boutique hotels as well as guesthouses disguised as boutique properties. We are also searching to get the best staff with quality service to exceed customers’ expectations, as service quality can be a unique selling point.



Noudeng Chanthaphasouk
Director of planning
Lao Airlines

The biggest challenge will come from competition from Thai Airways International and Vietnam Airlines. The possibility of open skies in ASEAN will create even more competition and we must prepare now. We also need to improve our aircraft and in-flight service, and focus on purchasing a mid-haul jet.

Has ASEAN taken off as a single destination?

ASEAN is still undergoing integration, and most member countries have signed a mutual regional agreement on standards. We are continuing to promote ASEAN as a single destination. When Laos hosts ATF (in 2013), we will discuss strategies to make ASEAN more visible to the rest of the world.

Among the countries that form ASEAN, there are definitely those which have been a single destination for many years. Vietnam over the last few years has also managed to enter that league. But most ASEAN countries are still often explored in combination with others.

No. Each country is still a single destination. Europeans do not understand what ‘ASEAN’ means. It is an organisation that only South-east Asians know, not a destination. ASEAN needs more joint marketing activities to make it a solid brand.

No. There is too much competition in air access for single destinations and there are too many secondary markets. Besides, the ASEAN member countries have yet to ratify the agreement to promote the region as a single destination. We are all still viewed as individual markets.

Which ASEAN destination, apart from yours, are you most impressed with and why?

I am impressed with Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia, as they are all doing well. I believe the root of their success is the amount they spend on promotions per person.

With the growth in air capacity, Singapore...plays a strategic role as the gateway to all ASEAN countries.

Singapore as well as Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. Look at their aggressive promotions. All have huge marketing budgets and know how to spend them. Singapore has events like F1, major new hotels, and modern attractions and infrastructure. These make visitors stay longer.

Thailand and Vietnam because they get longhaul traffic. I am also impressed by destinations which have several major airlines, such as Malaysia, which has AirAsia (operating) alongside the national carrier.

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1960s

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All talk, smiles and action

ASEAN NTO chiefs meet again and take a moment off to smile for *TTG Asia ATF Daily's* Patrick Tan



Brunei Tourism's Sheikh Jamaluddin Sheikh Mohamed, Brunei's Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources' Md Riza Md Yunos and Pg Izudin Abas



Department of Tourism Philippines' Alex Macatuno and Benito Bengzon JR



Ministry of Culture and Tourism Indonesia's Hengky Manurung, Syamsul Lussa, I Gde Pitana, Hamdan Rivai and Achyaruddin



ASEAN Secretariat's Somsak Pipoppinyo and Eddy Krismeidi



Lao National Tourism Administration's Vang Rattavong and Singapore Tourism Board's Kevin Leong



Japan Endless Discovery's Yamada Naoyoshi, Institute for Tourism and Hospitality Russia's Yuri V Kopylov, Korea Tourism Organisation's Pyung-Sup Shin and Federal Agency for Tourism Russia's Valery Korovkin



Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Ruos Sam Ear and ASEAN-Japan Centre's In Thoeun



Ministry of Culture and Tourism Indonesia's I Gusti Putu Laksaguna and Tourism Malaysia's Musa Yusof

Lao National Tourism Administration's Khom Douangchantha, Lao's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Kham-Inh Khitchadeth, Lao National Tourism Administration's Sounh Manivong, Ministry of Hotels & Tourism Myanmar's Htay Aung, Union of Myanmar Travel Association's Maung Maung Swe and ASEAN-Japan Centre's Fuchigami Joukei



Ministry of Tourism Government of India's Devesh Chaturvedi, Embassy of India, Cambodia's Saurav Ray, and Indiatourism, Singapore's Rajesh Talwar and O P Meena



Ministry of Tourism Malaysia's Christiana Tharsis, Mohd Akmal Abd Malik and Mohd Daud Mohd Arif



ASEAN-Japan Centre's Fuchigami Joukei, Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Thok Sokhom, Ministry of Culture and Tourism Indonesia's Wardiyatmo and ASEAN-Japan Centre's In Thoeun



Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration's Qi Yongjiang Peter, Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office's Mason Florence and Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Sok Sokun

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Hotel HR solution

Hotel boom spurs members to seek HR help from one another

By Mimi Hudoyo

AHEAD of their massive room expansion, emerging ASEAN countries are seeking assistance from their counterparts that have advanced human resource (HR) training programmes.

Indonesia Hotels and Restaurant Association (IHRA) chairman Yanti Sukamdani told the *Daily* after the ASEAN Hotels & Restaurants (AHRA) meeting yesterday: "Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia have requested for the training, and we will start with rank-and-file vocational training for hotel and restaurant staff. Each course will take between six months and a year."

Lao Hotel and Restaurant

Association president Oudet Souvannavong said: "There are between 10 and 20 hotels under development in various cities in Laos that will open within the next two years with approximately 2,000 rooms."

"Many of the existing hotels also need to upgrade their properties and services to be able to deliver standards required by tourists."

"We need the vocational training and we are going to work with IHRA to do this."

Myanmar is also in the process of adding some 3,000 rooms in anticipation of the Asian Games it is hosting in 2013.

Myanmar Tourism Promo-

tion Board marketing committee chairman, Dr Aung Myat Kyaw, said: "There are many hotel developments taking place in the new capital in preparation for the event."

"Therefore, we will need a lot more trained staff to run these properties. Besides, with the development of international hotel chains, there are more trained staff sent out to new properties overseas."

"We actually have our own hotel school and we also have training programmes with Singapore's Shatec for over 10 years. But now we want to learn from IHRA and see how its programmes can fit with our needs."

ASEAN countries want Russian interest to peak

By Karen Yue

RUSSIAN outbound feed to the ASEAN region grew to 562,000 last year, from 458,000 in 2009, with Thailand receiving the bulk of Russian travellers, said Valery Korovkin, head, international department of Russia's Federal Agency For Tourism.

Speaking to the *Daily* after a meeting between ASEAN NTOs and Russia, Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports deputy permanent secretary Thanitta Maneechote said Russian arrivals to Thailand in 2010 leapt almost 100 per cent over 2009.

"Pattaya was the hot favourite for Russian tourists, but last year saw Phuket rising in popularity too. In fact, the Russian market became Phuket's biggest source market, overtaking Scandinavia," Thanitta said.

"Seventy per cent of Russian tourists to Thailand are repeats. Many have been to Pattaya, so they are looking at other resort destinations in Thailand. And that, we have many!"

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) senior director, international group, Kevin Leong, said Russian arrivals to Singapore also saw growth, although this was "modest compared to what

Thailand saw". The citystate had 7.9 per cent more Russian tourists between January and November 2010, compared to the same period in 2009.

Korovkin said: "With that many Russians heading out to ASEAN, we have to make sure our people get quality service. For example, it is important that tour guides in ASEAN are able to speak Russian, and destinations should have signs and travel materials in the Russian language. As such, Russia has been providing Russian language courses for ASEAN tour guides for years."

STB's Leong, however, hoped Russia could offer this sponsorship to more tour guides, explaining that only three guides from Singapore were given the opportunity to take up this course in Russia last year.

Representatives from other ASEAN NTOs also called for more marketing support from Russia.

Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism director general Tith Chantha said ASEAN representatives had tabled a suggestion for Russia to offer free booth space to ASEAN sellers at travel trade shows held there. "Russia has taken note of our request," Chantha said.

Boost for Cambodia's coastal region

THE Cambodia Hotel Association (CHA) approved the formation of a Coastal Region Chapter on January 14 to drive more tourism traffic to the area, which comprises Kep Province, Kampot Province, Koh Kong and Kompong Som.

The new chapter will be CHA's

fourth chapter, which previously included the National Chapter, the Siem Reap Chapter and the Sihanoukville Chapter.

CHA president Luu Meng said a number of hotels had already signed up for the new chapter. "For Cambodia to grow tourism numbers, it is important to give

travellers more reasons to stay longer here. And one way to do that is to show them what Cambodia has in the coastal region."

He explained that most tourists would visit Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, and consider the coastal destinations only as an add-on. — Karen Yue

Tourism dialogue takes centrestage

Patrick Tan spends a day with the ASEAN NTOs as they exchange updates and discuss collaborations



Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra's Giuliano Callegaro and Edina Zmak



Agence Française de Développement in Phnom Penh's Christofer China and UNESCO Phnom Penh's Anne Lemaistre



Singapore Tourism Board's Chia Ghim Chuan and Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Hoy Phireak



Vietnam National Administration of Tourism's Tran Thi Phuong Nhung and Hoang Thi Diep



Embassy of the Republic of Singapore's Edgar Pang, Yunus Rahman and Singapore Tourism Board's Suhaimi Bin Sainy



China National Tourism Administration's Mi Han, Zhu Ning, Wang Yanjie and Wang Xiaoyu



Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Prak Vuthy and NagaWorld Cambodia's Kevin Nyland



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