

Australians tip an 'Asian' year

Tour operators anticipate business to ASEAN to rise phenomenally in 2011 due to push factors

By Gracia Chiang

AUSTRALIAN tour operators are dubbing 2011 as the 'year of Asian travel', anticipating record numbers of Australian travellers to ASEAN, thanks to new flights, a strong currency and even the country's recent floods.

Aileen Collins, personal travel manager of Travel Managers, said she was looking at a 15 per cent growth in business to South-east Asia this year, compared to a 20 per cent slide in 2010 over 2009.

"While last year was the American year, this year, I think, will be the Asian year," said Collins, explaining that while the rising Australian dollar has also made holidays to the US and Europe

attractive, the additional fillip for the region are new flights being launched from Australia to ASEAN destinations.

Just last month, Australia-based full-service carrier Strategic Airlines announced that it would mount non-stop Brisbane-Bali flights from March on a route currently dominated by no-frills airlines.

This followed earlier announcements late last year by Strategic of new flights from Melbourne and Brisbane to Phuket, both beginning next month.

Collins said the news had already triggered some response from Australians, with the number of enquiries since



Graham: booming business

he was also looking at a 20 per cent increase in business this year compared to stagnant growth last year.

Cox said the potential of certain value-for-money destinations such as Cambodia was even encouraging him to "think very carefully" about diversifying

Christmas up 10 to 15 per cent over the same period last year.

Peter Cox, director of Eventuality, which serves corporate clients, said he

was also looking at a 20 per cent increase in business this year compared to stagnant growth last year.

Cox said the potential of certain value-for-money destinations such as Cambodia was even encouraging him to "think very carefully" about diversifying

into the FIT market in order to tap the thriving demand.

Riding on strong demand for ASEAN destinations, Australia-headquartered STA Travel said it would also be increasing the pages in its Asia 2011 brochure by 25 per cent, which will be launched next week.

Said its Asia-Pacific Division product manager Natasha McLaughlin: "We're definitely seeing year-on-year growth, and travellers are interested in both adventure holidays as well as the beaches of Thailand, Bali and Malaysia."

Robert Graham, managing director, All About Asia, said that other than popular ASEAN desti-

nations such as Thailand, he was also seeing booming business to the Philippines, as Australians were flocking to the country due to the English-speaking abilities of the local population and the fact that it was "not crowded".

Asked if the recent floods across Australia would dent travel sentiment, a seller said on the contrary, the floods might dampen domestic travel to the Brisbane region and further encourage locals to travel overseas, especially with prices in ASEAN being cheaper. An old apartment along the Sunshine Coast would cost at least A\$120 (US\$120.30), a price that could fetch a room at a five-star hotel in ASEAN.

Air France's resumption a huge fillip for Cambodia

By Brian Higgs

AIR France will resume flights from Paris to Phnom Penh on March 27 after a 35-year hiatus, marking the first longhaul service connecting Europe and Cambodia. The carrier previously served its former colony from the early 50s until the Khmer Rouge seized control in 1975.

Voyageurs Associes managing director Jacky Pilo said: "The fact that you have the French national carrier serving this route is very important. We will be able to gather travellers from around France and increase our business out of Paris with these flights."

"The French market loves Cambodia, it is almost like a second home," said Asia Voyages deputy director of production Virginie Gerbault. "While it is still too early to give exact figures, there will definitely be an increase in business."

Gerbault added Asia Voyages had already been approached by Air France and was developing packages and special promotions for the next winter season, targeting FITs and groups in particular.

An Airbus A340-300 will be used on the thrice-weekly flights between Paris and Phnom Penh, with a Bangkok stopover. During the summer of 2011, Air France will switch to a Boeing 777-200ER.

Tith Chantha, director general, Ministry of Tourism (MoT) Cambodia, said: "This will be a way for more European travellers to come to Cambodia, and the local people will be able to reap the benefits of the increase in tourism activity. Cambodians will also be able to easily travel to Europe."

Gerbault added: "Previously, Siem Reap was usually an extension to travel in Vietnam, but now we will have new opportunities to bring people straight to Cambodia, not only to Siem Reap, but also to Phnom Penh."



Kuenzle: milestone

Asked whether this would affect business to Vietnam, both Asia Voyages and Voyageurs Associes said that won't be the case. "It will be a win-win situation for all with more visitors coming into the region, explained Pilo.

Asian Trails group managing director Laurent Kuenzle agreed. "This resumption of flights by a European carrier from Europe to Cambodia will be an important milestone," he said. "It will benefit tourists and business travellers alike with convenient connections through Air France's Paris Charles de Gaulle hub."

MoT and the travel trade plan to do either roadshows to France or organise fam trips to Cambodia. These were planned to take place after ITB Berlin, said Cambodia Government-Private Sector Forum co-chair - tourism working group Ho Vandy. Ho, who is also managing director of World Express Tours & Travel, said the flights would help sell Cambodia as a mono destination to the French and neighbouring European countries, and promote longer stays, beyond the average three nights. Another agent, Apsara Tours product assistant manager, Hang Lina, is developing new tour itineraries for the French market to supplement the present classic tours. - **Additional reporting by S. Puvaneswary**



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Forget a raise

Rate recovery still dicey for Thai hotels

By Sirima Eamtako

THAI hotels are advised to continue with tacticals this year and maintain rates for the next contracting season, with buyers citing a weak economy and currency, especially in Europe, coupled with room oversupply in some Thai areas, as the main reasons.

Hotelbeds' head of contracting Thailand/Indochina, Alon Miler, based in Bangkok, said it was pointless for them to raise rates, only to roll out stay/pay deals later.

Bangkok-based Go Vacation Thailand's executive director for product and contracting, Hermann Wegmueller, said the stronger baht against the euro had already caused prices in Thailand to rise by 20-25 per cent over the last six months.

Even markets whose economies are stronger are making similar calls. Wettstein Switzerland's senior product manager Dagmar Waeber said even if Thai hotels were to ask for a small percentage hike, that would translate to a big increase due to the strong baht. "I would suggest hotels to maintain rates, but not

drop them, as that would be asking too much," she said.

FDM Travel Denmark's product manager Jens Lossow said he hoped Thai hotels would roll out special deals, although he was not expecting the deals to be as aggressive as last year.

Wegmueller said hotels in destinations facing an oversupply, such as Phuket and Bangkok, would most likely reintroduce stay/pay deals, especially during the summer season.

Thai hotels are working out their strategies. Some hotels in Bangkok are mulling to drop rates altogether and not bother with stay/pay deals, while some beach resorts, particularly in the Andaman coast, are attempting an inflation adjustment rise.

For Emerald Khaolak Beach Resort and Spa general manager Vichien Kitsuan, special deals are here to stay – "but hopefully no more 1+1 night specials". Dusit International global sales director Simon Burgess, on the other hand, hopes to build back rates, seeing business has picked up 10-15 per cent in the first quarter.

Cruise ports make waves

By Karen Yue

THE new Asia Cruise Terminal Association aims to grow its ASEAN membership, which now comprises only Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnam.

The association was initiated by the Singapore Cruise Centre (SCC) and Shanghai Wusongkou International Cruise Development Company. China, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan are its other members.

SCC chairman Soo Kok Leng said a concerted effort to develop cruising infrastructure in Asia was needed, as "cruise liners, when planning their itineraries, are guided by how marketable the destinations are".

He urged: "It would be to everyone's benefit to be a part of this forum, as we work towards... building our region into the Caribbean of the East."

Soo's call comes even as emerging cruise destinations

in ASEAN are waking up to the market's potential.

Cambodia Ministry of Tourism's director-general, Tith Chantha, said the country was committed to growing arrivals through cruising.

Speaking to *TTG Asia* on the sideline of the ASEAN NTOs meeting on Sunday, Tith Chantha said: "Tapping cruises for arrivals is part of our strategy. We regard cruising as an important part of tourism. Cambodia has already a beautiful seaport in Sihanoukville that has the facilities to attract leisure cruises, and cruise facilities in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. At the same time, airports across Cambodia are helping to facilitate (fly-cruise) tourists."

Chantha said new ports would be built in Kep and/or Kampot province by 2015 to service "tourist ships" that would cruise along the Cambodia coast.

Sound bites

"These travellers are not eccentric. They are eco-centric."

Lee Choon Loong, Discovery MICE Malaysia's CEO, describing travellers who are willing to go to remote destinations so that some money would go to local communities during his presentation at the ASEAN Tourism Conference yesterday

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Airline invests as Myanmar changes

By Mimi Hudoyo

MYANMAR Airways International (MAI) has outlined a four-year expansion in light of political changes in the country, which it expects will result in tourism growth.

MAI managing director Aung Gyi said: "The changing government – from military to civilian – has sent a positive message not only to tourists but investors and businessmen. We are expecting the

number of visitors to Myanmar to grow.

"In line with this, we have set up a four-year expansion plan. We are planning to add up to 10 more aircraft to our fleet, and are looking at investing in the Airbus 330."

This would enable MAI to expand its route network in ASEAN and China, he said, in terms of both point-to-point services and sixth freedom traffic.

Aung said: "We are considering extending services to Indonesia on our Yangon-Singapore current service, for example."

The airline now has four aircraft, connecting Yangon with Calcutta, Guangzhou, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Singapore.

Commenting on the new developments in Myanmar, FDM Travel Denmark product manager Jens Lossow said: "We do not have a programme to Myanmar at the

moment, but we are looking to develop it. We are going to study the product and prepare our staff with product knowledge before we launch it."

Even US buyer RMK Travel is upbeat. The agency's owner Arthur Hecker said: "I'm sure a lot of Americans would like to go there as the country has been cut off from the rest of the world for so many years, but it will take awhile."

Culinary tours are steaming hot

DORISON Travel Singapore is seeing good response for culinary tours to South-east Asia which it launched last April.

Managing director Jimmy Sim said most of the bookings were from Singapore clients and longhaul travellers as part of their South-east Asian programmes.

The tours to Thailand and Indonesia last four to five days, with each group comprising no more than 15 participants, who visit local markets, get shopping and cooking lessons from quality chefs and learn about Asian spices and the culture behind popular dishes.

"We decided to take our culinary tours into South-east Asia after seeing good demand for culinary tours to Japan and France," Sim explained.

Such experiential trips are also popular with Brazilians, according to United Tour Brazil's owner Jorge Barbosa. "Brazilian travellers are particularly receptive to our tours combined with cooking classes in Thailand, India and Vietnam."

He cited value-for-money and direct flights as additional pull factors for Brazilians to visit the region. – **Karen Yue and Brian Higgs**

Tracker

An update on major issues and events from the past

ASEAN's first Universal Studios, opened on March 18, 2010 in Singapore, tipped to shift business

THEN Agents expect visitors to skip older attractions in the city, as most travellers spend no more than two nights in Singapore and will want to make the most of the theme park's high entrance fee – S\$72 (US\$56) for a weekend ticket. They worry this will impact their earnings, as existing attractions provide better margins and impose fewer restrictions.

NOW Their prediction is spot-on. Jurong Bird Park, Night Safari and Singapore Zoo experienced a drop from April to October, with Mainland Chinese numbers falling three to four per cent. The Singapore Discovery Centre also failed to see an increase in visitor numbers.

FUTURE Existing attractions affected by Universal Studios are taking action. The Wildlife Reserves Singapore, which manages Jurong Bird Park, Night Safari and Singapore Zoo, is looking to launch tacticals this year in conjunction with charter flights from China, while the Singapore Discovery Centre is focusing on promoting to overseas student groups. New chairman of the Association of Singapore Attractions, Kevin Cheong, said existing attractions needed to stay relevant by increasing participation at international trade shows and working with agents to introduce novel packages. – **Karen Yue**



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A pearly white affair for all

Lots of smiles to go around at ATF 2011's opening ceremony, exhibition floor and conferences. By **Patrick Tan**



Indonesian tourism delegation with Indonesia Minister of Culture and Tourism, Jero Wacik



Cambodia Prime Minister Hun Sen arriving at the opening ceremony of ATF 2011



ASEANTA Malaysia's Datuk Mohd Ilyas, Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association's Wiryanti Sukamdani, Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Kousoum Saroeuth, Philippine Airlines' Thessa Silvestre-Dela Paz, NATAS's Patricia Auyeong and DusitD2 Baraquada Pattaya's Serm Phenjati



Big Pond Australia's Gordon Grimwade and University of the Sunshine Coast's R W Bill Carter



Reliance Sightseeing Malaysia's Henry Lee



New Poland's Ewa Bujek Varsavolo and Jolanta Maciejewska-Menuet



Penang Global Tourism's Leandro Lopez and G Hotel Malaysia's Ving Leong



DBA & Sons Travel & Tours UAE's T Prahlad

Lily Travel Singapore's David Chua



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Changing strategy

Malaysia switches gears, going niche, high-yield and mid-haul, reports **S Puvaneswary**

NTO Tourism Malaysia is focusing on niche products this year, promoting ecotourism, angling, golf and scuba diving to attract more high-yield tourists.

According to Amirrudin Abu, deputy director general (marketing), Tourism Malaysia will also tap into a new segment – volunteer tourism, which targets senior citizens looking for a combination of travel and voluntary work. The NTO will help place these tourists with organisations that may interest them, such with local communities or animal rehabilitation centres that protect the population sizes of endangered species.

Tourism Malaysia will also concentrate on medium-haul markets, which currently constitute around 15 per cent of total arrivals. The idea is to grow this segment to 43 per cent over 10 years. Marketing efforts will be intensified in China, India, South Korea, Australia and Japan, all high-yield markets with good connectivity to Malaysia and a large base of travellers.

Access The extension of Kota Kinabalu International

Airport's runway from 2,988m to 3,780m will be completed on March 18. This will allow the airport to accommodate the Airbus A380 and handle 25 flights an hour, from the current 12.

Malaysia Airlines (MAS) launched four-weekly direct flights between Kuching and Seoul via Kota Kinabalu on January 15. On the same day, it also introduced thrice-weekly direct flights between Kota Kinabalu and Perth. MAS is also looking at flying to new points in China, Japan, India and South Korea.

Firefly, a wholly-owned unit of MAS, will soon compete with AirAsia for budget travellers on regional routes. This year, it will acquire six Boeing B737-800s, which will be used to fly to capital and secondary cities in ASEAN, said Firefly's managing director Eddy Leong. At press time, no international routes had been announced yet.

Firefly currently flies twice daily from Kuala Lumpur to Kota Kinabalu and twice daily from Kuala Lumpur to Kuching.

From January 24, the airline will increase its frequencies to thrice daily from Kuala Lumpur to Kota Kinabalu and four times a day between Kuala Lumpur



"Bookings from long-haul European markets are firming up from April 2011 onwards. I strongly believe 2011 will be a good year for tourism."

James Wan
Executive director
Planet Borneo Tours

and Kuching.

Hotels Two new properties are expected to ease the traditional room shortage in Kuala Lumpur during the year-end holidays.

Park Regis Kuala Lumpur opens this month on Jalan Imbi with 445 suites. This marks Australia-based StayWell Hospitality Group's maiden venture in the Malaysian hospitality scene.

Pullman Kuala Lumpur Bangsar, scheduled to open in 2011, will be Accor's largest hotel in South-east Asia, with 513 rooms, five restaurants, two bars, 10 meeting rooms and a ballroom for 1,200 people banquet-style. It will be the third Pullman in Malaysia, after Pullman Putrajaya and Pullman Kuching.

"There are sufficient five-star properties in the capital. What we need now are more good three- and four-star properties," said Adam Kamal, Tina Travel & Agencies' managing director.

In Malacca, Hatten Square Suites and Shoppes Malacca will open in September with 700 rooms, alleviating the city's room crunch during weekends, festive periods and year-end school

holidays, said William Chan, managing director of Stadthuys Tours & Travel.

Rates Hotels in the three- to five-star categories are expected to increase their rates by eight to 20 per cent this year.

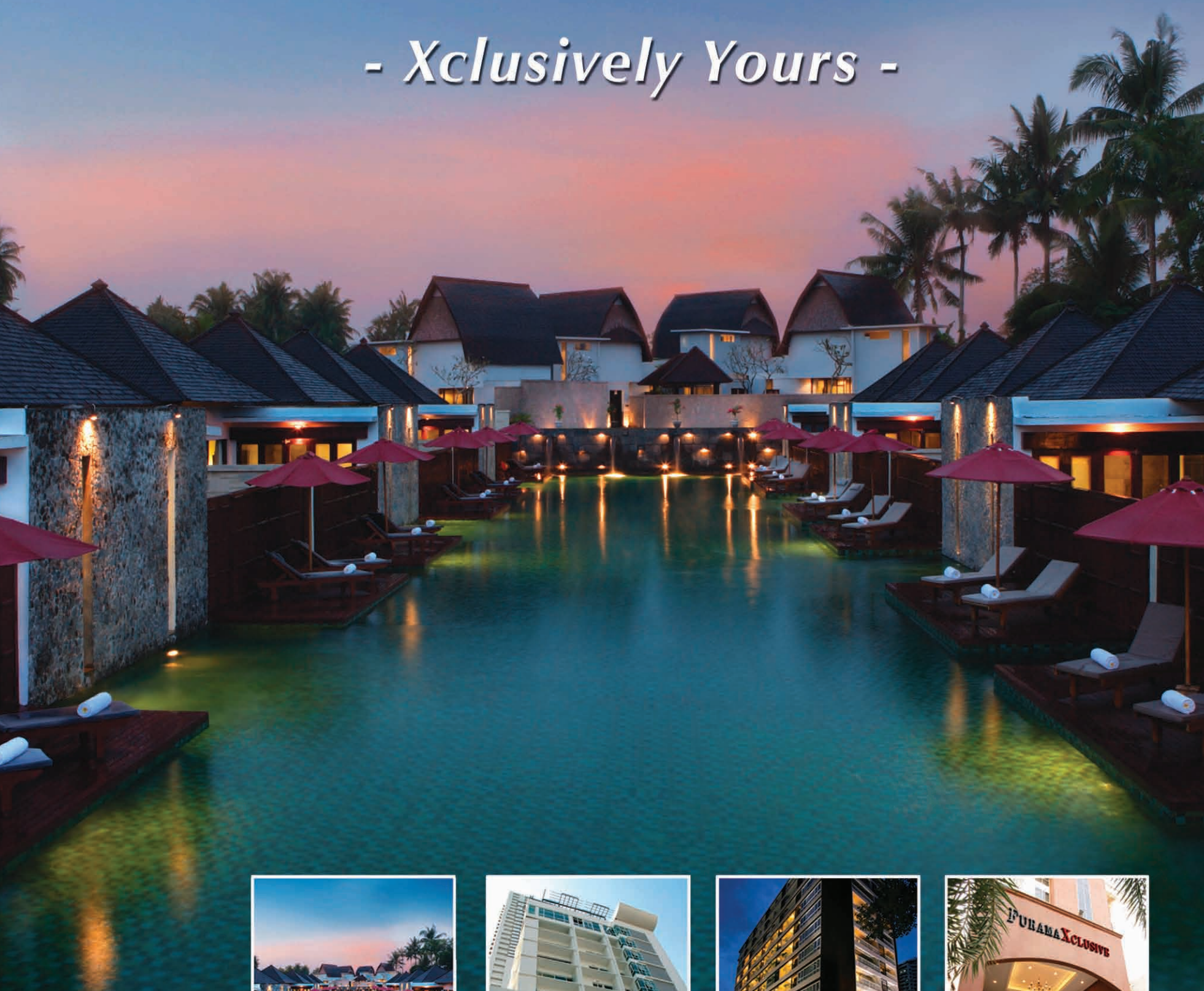
In 2010, five-star hotels in Kuala Lumpur commanded US\$100 to US\$130; four-star hotels, between US\$70 and US\$90; and three-star properties, from US\$49 to US\$65.

"A 20 per cent increase is not as steep as it seems, as some hotels had dropped their rates so low in 2009 and only managed to get back to 2008 levels in 2010," explained K T Foo, Sri Sutra Travel group general manager.

Alex Lee, CEO of Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours, said the rate increase was reasonable. But he cautioned hotels that the tariff hike should commensurate with improvement in service standards.

Ivo Nekvapil, vice president of the Malaysian Association of Hotels, expects key tourist destinations such as Penang, Langkawi, Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu to score occupancy rates of 61 to 65 per cent this year.

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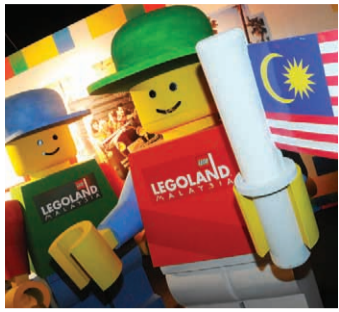


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LEGOLAND

LEGOLAND Malaysia

What The first LEGOLAND theme park in Asia will be completed in 2012, a year ahead of schedule. Designed and operated by Merlin Entertainments, the 31-hectare attraction will feature over 40 interactive rides, shows and attractions. It will be the centrepiece of Medini North, the lifestyle and leisure hub of Medini Iskandar Malaysia in Johor, which will be launched in 2012.

Contact

Roslina Arbak, head of communications & external relations, Iskandar Investment
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Johor Premium Outlets

What Genting Plantations and Simon Property Group will form a 50:50 joint venture called Genting Chelsea to invest and operate premium outlets in Malaysia.

The first project in this collaboration is the Johor Premium Outlets, opening this year in Kulai, Johor. The Chelsea Premium Outlets brand is recognised as a mark of quality and authenticity by shoppers around the world.

Contact

Email corrinne.ling@genting.com

KLIA2

What A new, low-cost carrier terminal at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) should be ready to accept flights in April 2012.

KLIA2 will be located 2km from the main terminal building and will be used exclusively by low-cost carriers (LCCs).

It will be the largest LCC Terminal (LCCT) in Asia, with an initial handling capacity of 30 million passengers annually, double that of the current terminal. There will be 72 gates and a

new dual-mode runway that will allow a 25-minute turnaround. Once the new terminal is open, the current LCCT will be converted into a cargo terminal.



Terrapuri Heritage Village

Terrapuri Heritage Village Penarik, Terengganu

What The resort, opening in March, comprises 20 villas equipped with modern facilities.

The buildings are restored Malay aristocratic houses and a 19th century palace in Terengganu, both of which are more than a century old. The 19th century palace of Sultan Mansur II and its surrounding buildings inspired the layout of the resort.

The resort would appeal to frequent travellers who are tired

of staying in hotels and to those who would like to experience local heritage.

Contact

Email patrvl@tm.net.my

KLCC-Bukit Bintang pedestrian connectivity

What Plans are ongoing to provide 7km of pedestrian walkways for a seamless connection between shopping malls and hotels in the KLCC (Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre)-Bukit Bintang shopping district.

The first phase of development will be completed in February and will connect KLCC to Pavilion Shopping Centre, Fahrenheit 88 shopping centre to Lot 10 Kuala Lumpur, and

Pavilion to Fahrenheit 88 shopping centre.

Contact

Tourism Unit at Kuala Lumpur City Hall
Email noraza@dbkl.gov.my

Melaka Alive

What The Melaka Alive production presents historical tales of Malacca through a light-and-sound presentation using projected water screens on board the Bahtera Merdeka ship.

Show time starts in April. The project is spearheaded by Sarner IXL, a content provider for branding promotions and theme park management.

Contact

Website www.sarner.asia



KLCC

My choices

Malaysia

Compiled by S Puvaneswary



Azizan Noordin

Acting director general
 Tourism Malaysia

How to put the packages together to promote high-end products and gain a bigger marketshare of high-yield tourists. We must make product owners understand the importance of quality service and how to best serve luxury tourists. This is a new segment for Malaysia.

I would think so. Many medium- and longhaul markets are now doing more than one destination when they come to South-east Asia. Some do three, four countries. The birth of low-cost carriers in South-east Asia has helped tremendously in promoting tourism in the region. The NTOs in South-east Asia are also working together to promote multi-destinations.

I am impressed with more than one – Phuket and how it was rebuilt after the tsunami; Borobudur and how it attracts heritage and history lovers. Singapore's integrated resorts and city life are also impressive. Each destination is unique and complements each other.



Anthony Wong

Group managing director
 Asian Overland Services Tourism & Hospitality Group

Hiring and retaining good staff. This is not easy. Fresh graduates do not understand the industry and they do not have enough experience and work concept.

Yes. Low-cost carriers have made it very affordable to travel in South-east Asia. Medium- and longhaul travellers who come to the region today tend to visit a few countries, as travel has become so affordable. Thirty years back, we had to depend on medium- and longhaul markets for business. Now a bulk of the business is from South-east Asians travelling within the region.

Cambodia, Siem Reap in particular. I recently went to Siem Reap and was amazed at the developments. There are lots of small hotels and guesthouses that are very affordable and, being family-operated, allow interaction with the local community. Angkor Wat is well preserved. The entrance fee is high, but it is only right as the collection goes towards maintenance of the area.



Jasmine Abdullah Heng

General manager
 Grand Dorsett Subang

Increasing hotel occupancy in the face of an oversupply of rooms. This is made all the more challenging with new hotels coming up. The government has to create more new events of international standard to draw international tourists to the country.

Yes, it has. Low-cost carriers have helped a lot to boost tourist arrivals into all the countries within ASEAN. Countries within ASEAN are also working together, rather than competing, for tourists. This is a good sign.

Bali, because it has come back so strongly since the bombings in 2005. I also love the service culture there, which is warm, friendly and very hospitable.



Azran Osman-Rani

CEO
 AirAsia X

Getting the rights to fly into Sydney. We see this as a very big market and in terms of direct flights to Sydney, Malaysia lags behind Thailand and Singapore. Flying to Sydney is a perfect match, as Malaysia has so much to offer this market, from ecotourism to shopping and holding a business event here.

ASEAN has come a long way. Intra-ASEAN flights are so affordable and well-connected that travellers are now looking for multiple destinations within ASEAN. And this lengthens their stay within ASEAN. The affordability of travelling within ASEAN makes this a very unique destination.

It is hard to single out a particular destination. ASEAN is all about celebrating diversity. With travel being so affordable today, you don't really need to pick one. You can choose three destinations, or four, or five.

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?

Sun Sodavy

Housekeeping
Allson Angkor
Siem Reap, Cambodia

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Do Thi Ngoc

Front Office Receptionist
Sunway Hotel Hanoi
Vietnam

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Ker Sokunthea

Executive Chef
Sunway Hotel Phnom Penh
Cambodia

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Sunil

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Sunway Resort Hotel & Spa
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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



Chow Laiwah
Executive director
IGI-Mice
Greece

What do you do? I am an international travel consultant who works with an international portfolio. IGI-Mice is the European/Overseas division of Best Travel Deals, which is based in Singapore.

What are you looking for at ATF 2011? New contacts as well as reconnecting with friends, suppliers and clients.

What do you like about buying travel? The possibility of finding new products, getting fresh ideas, and enhancing our own portfolio and offers for our clients.

What is the hardest thing about buying travel? Judging what you can really sell, what is "in" and what will be "in" tomorrow. Trying not to get carried away by your own personal tastes, but always keeping in mind clients and their preferences.

How can sellers get your attention and impress you? By being innovative in their approach and having a good attitude.

What upsets you most about sellers and/or travel trade-shows? The unprofessional attitude of sellers and sloppy organisation of a show.

What is the best destination you've ever been to and why? I love Asia (being half-Chinese myself) and therefore my holidays always involve Asia.

What is the easiest travel destination to sell and why? Thailand, as it has a reputation for nice beaches, culture and friendly people.

What is the one destination you'd like to visit but never had the chance to? I have never been to Australia, which is a problem if you sell a destination that you don't know yourself. I have a supplier that I can trust, but it is not the same.



Daniel Schneider
Sales manager
Siam Sun Tours
Thailand

What do you do? We are an inbound tour operator in Northern Thailand but many of our customers are also looking for packages in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. That is why we are always contacting agencies in these countries to buy their products.

What are you looking for at ATF 2011? We are interested in new products from tour operators and resorts/hotels in the above-mentioned countries as well as others.

What do you like about buying travel? The excitement that comes with wondering what you will see and get.

What is the hardest thing about buying travel? Some destinations have so much to offer that it can be difficult to make a decision on which products to get.

How can sellers get your attention and impress you? By being flexible and paying attention to individual requests from customers instead of offering only standard products.

What upsets you most about sellers and/or travel trade-shows? I haven't gotten upset with sellers at tradeshow so far, except that some companies might have good products but the person they send to the show doesn't have all the information you need.

What is the best destination you've ever been to and why? I like most destinations in the ASEAN region and do not have a favourite.

What is the easiest travel destination to sell and why? It is difficult to say, but perhaps the place you are based in is the easiest to sell. For us, it's Northern Thailand.

What is the one destination you'd like to visit but never had the chance to and why? Borneo. Don't ask me why, but it's definitely on my agenda!



Steve Lidgley
Asia product manager (Indian Subcontinent & The Orient)
Bales Worldwide, The UK

What do you do? I am the Asia product manager for Bales Worldwide.

What are you looking for at ATF 2011? New information on current products as well as new ideas and itineraries. I am particularly interested in different ways of seeing traditional locations, the cultural aspect and FIT tours.

What do you like about buying travel? The opportunity to keep improving products, learning about new destinations and introducing them to give our clients memorable holidays.

What is the hardest thing about buying travel? Bargaining on price and trying to assess which are quality products and avoiding ordinary ones.

How can sellers get your attention and impress you? By understanding Bales' needs and introducing only relevant products.

What upsets you most about sellers and/or travel trade-shows? When time is wasted talking to people who cannot assist my company and also the lack of coordination by organisers at times.

What is the best destination you've ever been to and why? In Asia, I would say Myanmar because of the wonderful people, history, great food and the fact that it is less developed than neighbouring countries.

What is the easiest travel destination to sell and why? China. Most clients follow the same route!

What is the one destination you'd like to visit but never had the chance to and why? Indonesia. I am sure it has potential as a Bales destination although its size makes it difficult to cover in a couple of weeks. It has culture, scenery and relaxing destinations too!



Lajpat Rai
Chairman
Lotus Trans Travels
India

What do you do? We are one of the leading tour operators in India.

What are you looking for at ATF 2011? Good and reliable groundhandling agents in ASEAN destinations.

What do you like about buying travel? Being able to meet most of the suppliers in one place and discussing what we can offer Indian clients.

What is the hardest thing about buying travel? Buying tour products at reasonable prices.

How can sellers get your attention and impress you? By offering the best packages that are value for-money as the Indian outbound market is very price-conscious.

What upsets you most about sellers and/or travel trade-shows? There are not many serious players.

What is the best destination you've ever been to and why? Koh Samui. It is different from Pattaya and Phuket because it is small and has many peaceful beaches. It also has great value for money.

What is the easiest travel destination to sell and why? Thailand as a whole offers excellent products that have good value such as spas and cultural shows.

What is the one destination you'd like to visit but never had the chance to and why? Laos. It seems like a fascinating destination to me because of its unique Buddhist temples and monasteries.

"(The hardest thing about buying travel is) judging what you can really sell, what is 'in' and what will be 'in' tomorrow."

Chow Laiwah
Executive director
IGI-Mice
Greece

INDULGING IN LUXURIOUS EXPERIENCES IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia's tourism industry has shown strong historical growth of 14 per cent over the last decade and 12 per cent over the last five years. However, the industry's performance has predominantly been dependent on growth in the number of arrivals.

In moving forward, Malaysia is looking at growing yield per tourist instead. In fact, its Tourism Minister, YB Dato' Sri Dr. Ng Yen Yen, has coined an industry mantra, "2020:36:168," to reflect this ambition, i.e. in the year 2020, Malaysia will receive 36 million tourist arrivals and RM168 billion tourist receipts. This would mean a receipt of RM4,675 from each tourist in 2020 compared to RM2,260 in 2009.

Tourism industry players are in support of this direction and recognise the need to attract high spending travellers by offering impeccable services and unique experiences that cater to the desires of this discerning market.

Luxury holidays on islands are one of them. Langkawi offers some of the finest resorts in the country. The Bon Ton, marketed as a boutique resort, offers guests a choice of eight authentic Malaysian kampung villas for accommodation set within a private compound with beautiful sunset views. Its success has prompted the owners to open a second boutique resort, The Temple Tree, which is a collection of authentic Malaysian homes of great heritage value.

The island is also home to luxury resorts like Four Seasons, The Westin and Tanjung Rhu Resort, that are noted for offering guests definitive experiences of sheer luxury.

Having celebrated its 125th anniversary last year, the Eastern & Oriental in Penang offers the finest traditions of colonial charm, comfort and service. All of its 101 suites have personal 24-hour butler service.

The mention of luxury and natural beauty often bring to mind the award-winning Pangkor Laut Resort in Pangkor Island. Voted by Condé Nast Traveller UK as the Number One Resort in the World in its Top 100 List in 2003, it is still revered among the most distinguished and celebrated in the world.

On Tioman Island in the east coast of Malaysia, JapaMala has created a niche for itself as a jungle-luxe boutique resort situated amid the lush green surroundings of Malaysia's forests. With only about a dozen villas with stunning sea views to boast of, it is clear that they are not catering to the ordinary tourist.

The states of Sabah and Sarawak also boast of luxury resorts. The Hilton Batang Ai Longhouse Resort in Sarawak is the only jungle property of the famed international hotel chain.

The Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Resort & Spa in Sabah offers a tranquil retreat with a breathtaking view of both sunrise and sunset. The luxury resort for golfing enthusiasts would definitely be the Sutera Harbour Resort. Here, you can even tee off well past sunset as its golf club offers the only night golfing opportunity in East Malaysia.

Luxury city hotels are also in abundance in Kuala Lumpur such as the Mandarin Oriental, Hilton KL and Le Meridien. The country is also anticipating the arrival of several world-class luxury hotels on its shores in the next few years such as the Grand Hyatt, The Regent and The St. Regis.

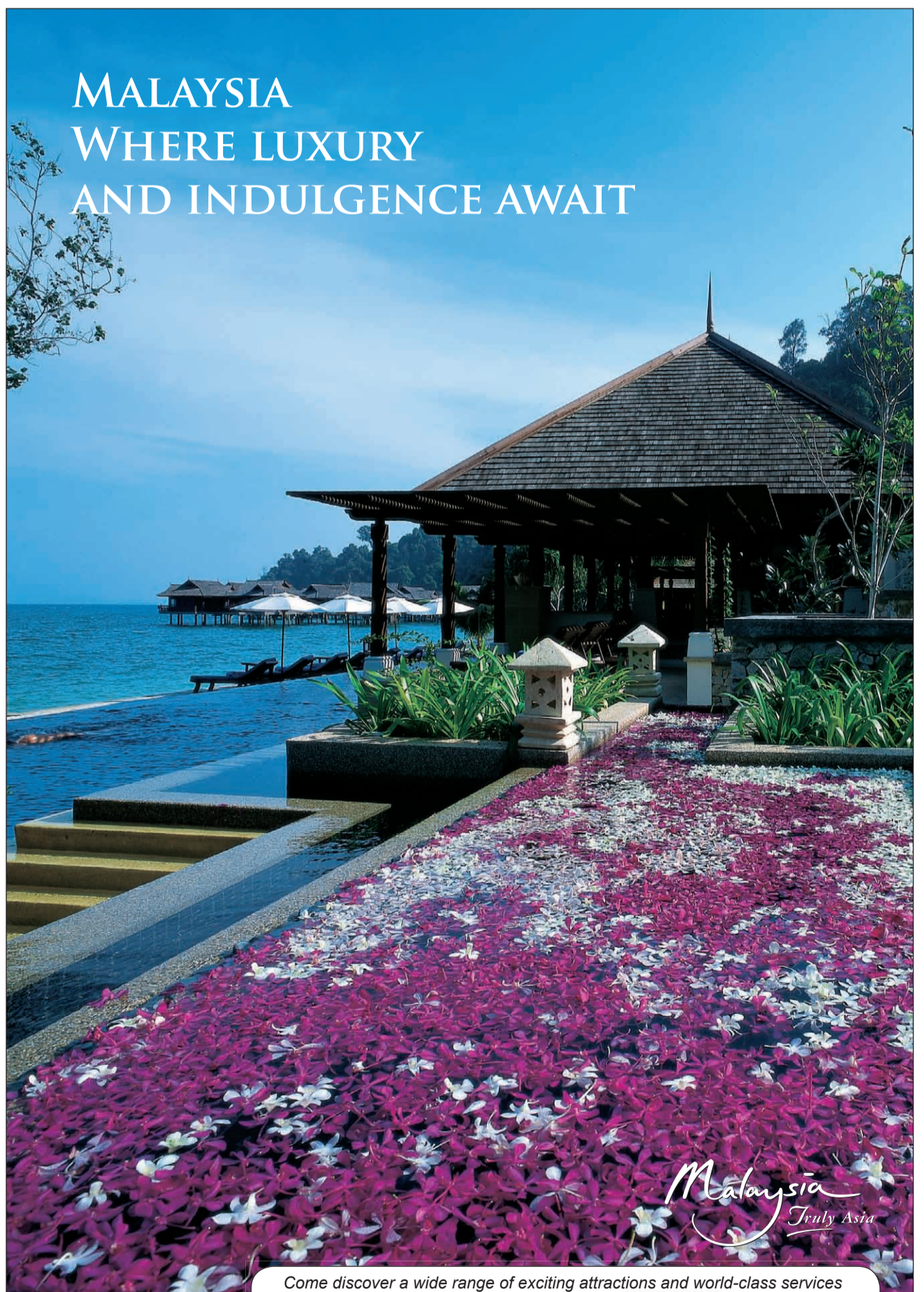
Malaysia's spa scene has, in recent years, rebranded itself to a position of exclusivity. The award-winning Spa Village brand is the epitome of a luxury spa retreat. Located in all YTL properties in Kuala Lumpur, Pangkor Laut, Tanjung Jara, Cameron Highlands and Melaka, it uses unique Asian healing rituals and natural resources to give you the most amazing rejuvenating experience. Also worth

mentioning is The Banjaran, a new 5-star luxury hot springs retreat.

Many people would agree that luxurious holidays wouldn't be complete without indulging in a high-end luxury-shopping spree. The Starhill Gallery features 'A Gallery of Rich Experiences' through some of the world's most exclusive brands and labels such as Audemars Piguet, Bvlgari, Chopard, Lanvin, Louis

Vuitton, Omega, Chaumet, and Dior.

The award-winning Pavilion Kuala Lumpur is another retail establishment offering a fine shopping experience with luxury brands like Hermes, Gucci, Prada and Tod's. Another retail choice is Suria KLCC, the pioneer in luxury shopping in Malaysia.



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Or contact us directly through:

Email: enquiries@tourism.gov.my • Tel: +603 2615 8188 • Fax: +603 2693 5884/0207



BEST WESTERN PREMIER Guro Seoul, Korea



BEST WESTERN Fukuoka Nakasu Inn Fukuoka, Japan



BEST WESTERN PLUS @ 20 Sukhumvit
Bangkok, Thailand
(Opening March 2011)

Best Western Growing Strong in Asia and the Middle East

Best Western International - The World's Largest Hotel Chain® - is enjoying continued and solid growth in Europe and Asia, where it continues to add new hotels and resorts in an ever expanding portfolio which boasts over 4,000 properties in more than 80 countries and territories worldwide.

According to the recently published rankings by MKG Hospitality – the global leading market research and consulting company for hotel and tourism, and PKF hotelexperts – Munich, Best Western International has the most number of hotels and hotel rooms under a single brand in Europe and Germany. The MKG rankings placed Best Western as the largest hotel brand with 1,289 hotels, offering 87,017 rooms across Europe, while the PKF hotelexperts ranked Best Western at the top in Germany based on number of hotels, with a total of 179 properties in operation.

Already holding the prestigious position in the west, Best Western's growth in Asia and the Middle East is in full swing. The goal is to have 300 hotels offering 60,000 rooms by 2015, which has positioned Best Western as the region's fastest growing international hotel chain. Currently, the chain has 166 hotels in operation, going through rebranding and under construction across Asia and the Middle East.

China, India, Japan, South Korea, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam are among the chain's key targeted destinations in Asia. In the Middle East – a region Best Western sees as holding strong potential for strategic development and brand growth – the targeted locations include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait.

As Best Western International forges ahead with its aggressive expansion, much attention is given to maintaining the consistent quality standards the chain is globally recognized for. In recognition of this, for four consecutive years (2007-2010), Best Western has been voted **Best Mid-Range Hotel Brand** by TTG Travel Awards with an outstanding **Best Marketing & Development Effort Award** in 2009 and 2010.



BEST WESTERN Laguna Beach Mauritius
Mauritius
(Opening February 2011)



BEST WESTERN Bangkok Hiptique
Bangkok, Thailand
(Opening February 2011)



BEST WESTERN Phanganburi Resort
Koh Phangan, Thailand
(Opening February 2011)

Upcoming properties in 2011:

Country/Property	Number of rooms	Opening
Bangladesh		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Al Amin, Dhaka	300	Q1 2011
BEST WESTERN Crown Pacific, Cox's Bazar	170	Q1 2011
Indonesia		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Basko Hotel, Padang	170	Q4 2011
BEST WESTERN Mangga Dua Hotel & Residence Jakarta	168	Q4 2011
Malaysia		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Sentral, Kuala Lumpur	352	Q1 2011
BEST WESTERN Marina Island, Pangkor	170	Q1 2011
BEST WESTERN Sandakan	180	Q3 2011
Mauritius		
BEST WESTERN Laguna Beach Mauritius	64	Q1 2011
Philippines		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER F1 the Fort, Fort Bonifacio	240	Q1 2011
BEST WESTERN Lex Capitol, Cebu	80	Q2 2011
BEST WESTERN Antel Suites Makati	130	Q1 2011
Thailand		
BEST WESTERN PLUS @ 20 Sukhumvit, Bangkok	78	Q1 2011
BEST WESTERN Bangkok Hiptique, Bangkok	56	Q1 2011
BEST WESTERN Phanganburi Resort, Koh Pha-Ngan	101	Q1 2011
BEST WESTERN Serenity Hua Hin, Hua Hin	54	Q3 2011
BEST WESTERN Thuk Chang, Bangkok	180	Q2 2011
Vietnam		
BEST WESTERN Dalat, Dalat	96	Q1 2011
Oman		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Muscat, Muscat	200	Q2 2011
Saudi Arabia		
BEST WESTERN AL-Hamra'a, Jeddah	148	Q3 2011
Kuwait		
BEST WESTERN Mahbola, Kuwait	96	Q4 2011
Japan		
BEST WESTERN Kansai Airport Hotel	200	Q2 2011
BEST WESTERN Nagoya	100	Q2 2011
BEST WESTERN Kyoto	87	Q2 2011



PREMIER

PLUS



Chocolate Hills Bohol, Philippines

Back to drawing board

The Philippines seeks to redress wrongs after a tumultuous year, writes **Ollie Quinquini**

NTO As the Philippines emerges from a difficult year, marred by a hostage-taking crisis in August that all but wiped out its Hong Kong market and a botched brand launch in November, the Department of Tourism (DoT) is looking to new markets to regain momentum lost by its many challenges in 2010.

The DoT is eyeing 3.6 million foreign arrivals this year, an eight per cent increase over the estimated 3.3 million arrivals in 2010. As of October last year, the country's visitor tally registered around 2.56 million arrivals, compared to 2.19 million over the same period in 2009.

India is expected to give Philippine tourism a leg up this year, with the DoT intensifying promotions in the market ahead of Philippine Airlines' (PAL) March 28 introduction of Manila-Delhi flights six times a week. Three flights will ply the route nonstop; the other three, via Bangkok.

Benito Bengzon, DoT assistant secretary for international tourism promotions, said the country was targeting a 50 per cent increase in Indian arrivals this year.

The DoT has also gone back

to the drawing board to produce a new brand campaign for the country, after its *Pilipinas, Kay Ganda!* (Philippines, So Beautiful!) campaign in November 2010 was slammed by the public and eventually dropped.

The NTO has set up a "slogan team" to conceptualise a new brand in consultation with the private sector.

Access The DoT is championing "pocket open skies" that would allow foreign carriers to fly to any point in the Philippines, apart from Manila.

But, according to PAL, the country has 47.4 million seats for foreign and local carriers, but only 10.97 million seats were used in 2009.

The country is already enjoying an access boost to major markets. South Korea's Jin Air launched five-weekly Clark-Incheon flights in October. Capacity on the Philippine-Singapore sector has likewise ballooned, with South East Asian Airlines (SEAIR) launching Singapore-Clark flights last December and Airphil Express supplementing its Manila-Singapore service with daily Cebu-Singapore



"We have various readings of openings of new hotels. But early operations are not seen to impact rates and occupancy immediately as new properties go through teething challenges."

Rose Libongco
Director of marketing
Sofitel Manila

pore flights from December 1.

Airphil Express also has flight entitlements to Hong Kong, while SEAIR is looking to add Hong Kong, Macau and Bangkok to its network.

Hotels According to the DoT, at least 80 new hotels opened throughout the country last year. Cebu got the bulk of the new rooms at 2,291, followed by Metro Manila with 605 and Palawan with 407. The most significant entrant last year was the 400-room Radisson Blu in Cebu, the brand's first property in Asia.

This year will see more rooms in Metro Manila, courtesy of the 300-room Fairmont Makati, 30-suite Raffles Makati, 400-room Novotel Manila Araneta Center and 500-room Radisson Hotel Manila Bay.

Following over the next few years are the 347-room Holiday Inn & Suites Makati (2013) and 500-room Shangri-La at the Fort (2014). The former will be the first purpose-built Holiday Inn property in the Philippines.

Ayala Land is starting a yet-to-be-named boutique hotel chain, with the first opening scheduled for 2012 in Metro Manila's Boni-

facio Global City. Other locations include Alabang, Quezon City, Davao and Cagayan de Oro.

Rates The law of supply and demand has been at play in the Philippines for years now as a room crunch has kept rates high. TRIPS Travel general manager Cesar Cruz said: "We do not have excess room capacity to offer leisure tourists in our neighbours' price range. A single national convention can easily take up all of Metro Manila's rooms."

Corporate accounts and the overseas Filipino market had been monopolising Metro Manila's room supply, added Blue Horizons Travel and Tours CEO, Alexander Stutely, who was banking on new openings over the next few years to bring average room rates (ARRs) down.

Sofitel Manila director of marketing Rose Libongco, however, said rates in the capital were poised to rise by four to seven per cent this year.

Metro Manila ARR was 5,115.16 pesos (US\$116.38) from January to November 2010, over 4,984.57 pesos in 2009. Nationwide ARR was 4,925.25 pesos, up from 2009's 4,787.62 pesos.

Products Integrated and beach resorts dominate portfolio of new attractions



Resorts World Manila

Resorts World Manila

What Resorts World Manila (RWM), which celebrated its grand opening last November, will see two more hotels rising in its 7.8 hectare plot adjacent to the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3.

RWM, which already has a casino, two hotels – the 342-room Marriott Hotel Manila and 172-suite Maxim’s Hotel – and an upscale mall, will welcome the 700-room budget Remington Hotel in the third quarter of the year and the four-star Hamilton Hotel in 2012.

RWM’s owner, Travellers International (a joint venture between Genting Hong Kong and

Alliance Global Group), is also developing a second integrated resort in the Philippine capital. The 40-hectare Resorts World Bayshore along Manila Bay will have gaming facilities, shopping arcades, family-themed attractions and close to 5,000 hotel rooms. Completion date was not available at press time.

Contact
Website www.rwmanila.com

Belle Grande Manila Bay

What Integrated resort Belle Grande Manila Bay, which is expected to soft open by the last quarter, will boast hotels as well as shopping, gaming and leisure facilities, including

a sports arena, a museum and an oceanarium. It will also have 200,000m² in gross leasable space.

The complex will be developed over five years in three phases. The first phase will have two 15-storey hotel towers with 500 Planet Hollywood-themed rooms, and a casino with 1,500 slot machines, 250 gaming tables and 100 VIP suites.

At press time, developer Belle Corporation was in talks with a Macau-based company on handling casino management.

Contact
Website www.bellecorp.com

Alphaland Boracay Gateway

What The 500-hectare Alphaland Boracay Gateway, adjacent to the Caticlan airport, will have residential and commercial establishments along with hotels, watersports facilities and a polo and country club.

Developer Alphaland Corporation will spend around a billion pesos (US\$22.7 million) on the fully integrated eco-resort township, which will take two to three years to complete. Some 300 million to 400 million pesos will be allocated for the project this year.

Mactan International Airport expansion

What Mactan International Airport’s expansion programme is on track for a September completion. The 178 million peso project will give the airport two additional passenger bridges.

Mactan International Airport recorded a 30 per cent increase in international arrivals from January to October last year, hitting the one million passenger mark in October 2010. The airport services an average of 320 international flights and 1,750 domestic flights a week.

El Nido cluster

What El Nido Palawan will have a cluster of four resorts by mid-year, following the acquisition of Club Noah Isabelle Resort by

Ten Knots Development Corporation, the owner and developer of the famed El Nido Resorts.

The 50-room Club Noah Isabelle, currently being refurbished, will reopen early this year as Apulit Island Resort. All-inclusive rates start from 8,000 pesos per person twin-share per night, covering all meals, boat transfers, tours and non-motorised watersports activities.

El Nido Resorts, which at present has El Nido Miniloc and El Nido Lagen in its portfolio, is building a third resort to cater to the ultra-luxury market. El Nido Pangalusian, whose 45 villas will each have a private beach, will command rates of US\$500 to US\$800 when it opens this May.

Contact
Website www.elnidoresorts.com



El Nido cluster



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Flying into clearer skies

The gloom and doom is over as ASEAN flag carriers grow revenues and spread their wings in 2011

Performance

Network

Expansion

Royal Brunei Airlines

By S Puvaneswary

Royal Brunei Airlines (RBA) performed well above targets last year and has set even higher goals this year. The airline's optimism stems from the warm reception of its refreshed B777-200ER product and the projected growth in demand spurred by booming economies in the markets in which it operates.

Shanghai was the only addition to RBA's network last year. The airline launched four weekly flights between Bandar Seri Begawan and Shanghai on March 28. The Chinese city brought RBA's network to 18 destinations across Asia, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the Middle East.

RBA will introduce four direct weekly flights to Melbourne on March 29.



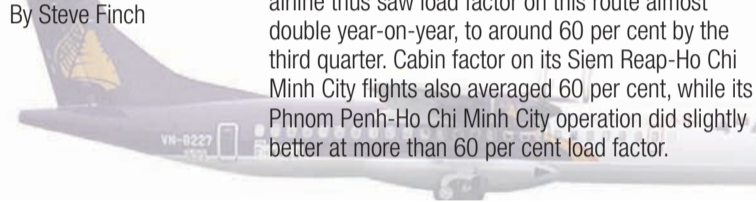
Cambodia Angkor Air

By Steve Finch

Cambodia Angkor Air (CAA), which took to the skies in July 2009, was the sole operator on the lucrative Phnom Penh-Siem Reap sector last year. The airline thus saw load factor on this route almost double year-on-year, to around 60 per cent by the third quarter. Cabin factor on its Siem Reap-Ho Chi Minh City flights also averaged 60 per cent, while its Phnom Penh-Ho Chi Minh City operation did slightly better at more than 60 per cent load factor.

CAA did not add any new points to its network last year as it concentrated on consolidating its monopoly on the Phnom Penh-Siem Reap route. For the winter season from November 2010 to March 2011, it added a daily flight to this sector, bringing frequency to five times a day.

CAA officials said flights to the three North Asian countries would be launched this year or after the airline has taken delivery of two newly ordered Airbus A321 aircraft. CAA is also considering services to Bangkok, Hanoi, Singapore and Dalat in Vietnam's Central Highlands.



Although the government had said at the start of 2010 that CAA would launch services to China, South Korea and Japan by year-end, these destinations were not included in CAA's winter schedule.

CAA has yet to operate flights to the country's other international airport in Sihanoukville, despite negotiations with airport operator Societe Concessionaire des Aeroports.

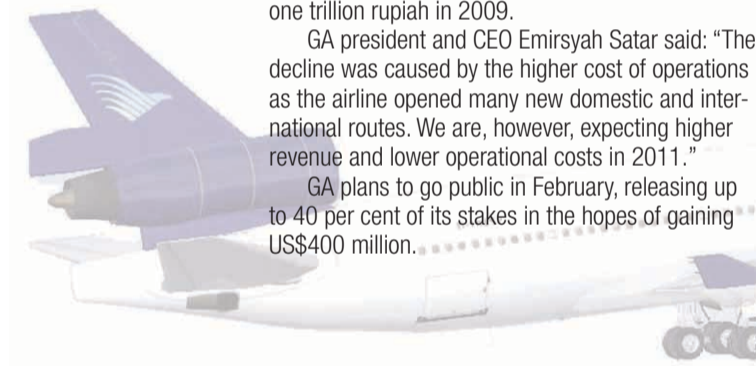
Garuda Indonesia

By Mimi Hudoyo

In the first nine months of 2010, Garuda Indonesia (GA) achieved a 15.5 per cent hike in revenue to 12.7 trillion rupiah (US\$1.41 million), from 11 trillion rupiah in the previous year. GA's net profit, however, fell by 81 per cent to 194 billion rupiah compared to one trillion rupiah in 2009.

GA resumed its Jakarta-Dubai-Amsterdam service on June 1, after a six-year hiatus. The airline's return on this route had been postponed a number of times. One of the main causes of the delay was the EU travel ban on Indonesian airlines.

GA plans to add at least three more regional points to its network this year. These are Brisbane, Taipei and a city in India.



GA president and CEO Emirsyah Satar said: "The decline was caused by the higher cost of operations as the airline opened many new domestic and international routes. We are, however, expecting higher revenue and lower operational costs in 2011."

GA also strengthened its South-east Asian network last year by introducing new routes, aircraft and upping frequencies to Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. It restarted services to Hong Kong from Bali and Surabaya, doubled frequency between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, and added two daily flights to its complement of five on the Jakarta-Singapore leg.

Agus Priyanto, the airline's executive vice president sales and marketing, said: "We are planning to fly Jakarta-Taipei. While waiting for more aircraft to be delivered, we are making market evaluation studies on Brisbane and India. We have yet to decide on which Indonesian point to use for the latter two."

On the domestic front, GA intends to start servicing Gorontalo and Belitung this year.

Japan also got a hefty boost with the August launch of daily Jakarta-Tokyo flights and the conversion of the five-weekly Denpasar-Osaka flights into a daily service from October.

Lao Airlines

By Bernie Rosenbloom

Lao Airlines enjoyed a cabin factor of more than 60 per cent with 302,000 passengers in the first nine months of 2010, a sharp improvement over its 2009 average of 57 per cent with 364,000 passengers.

Lao Airlines introduced thrice-weekly Vientiane-Pakse-Ho Chi Minh City flights in October.

Lao Airlines will concentrate this year on strengthening its position on existing routes. It will increase its thrice-weekly Luang Prabang-Siem Reap flights to five a week and turn its Luang Prabang-Hanoi flights into a daily service, from the current schedule of four times a week. The airline is also considering increasing the frequency of its Savannakhet-Bangkok flights from thrice-weekly to five times a week.

The airline hoped to end 2010 with 420,000 passengers and nab 480,000 in 2011, bringing its load factor closer to 65 per cent.

Lao Airlines planning director Noudeng Chanthaphasouk said the Vientiane-Bangkok sector had a good run with 65 per cent load but the return leg suffered from passengers opting to fly back from Udon Thani in Thailand to avail of cheaper airfares on low-cost carriers. The airline's Bangkok-Vientiane flights therefore only managed an average load factor of 50 per cent.

At press time, it intended to launch a twice-weekly service between Vientiane and U-Tapao (Pattaya) and turn its domestic thrice-weekly Vientiane-Xieng Khouang service into a daily flight sometime during the winter 2010 season. It would also be flexible in adjusting the frequency of its twice-daily Vientiane-Bangkok flights to three or four a day, depending on demand during the peak season.

Fleet upgrades are also on the agenda. Lao Airlines took delivery of two new ATR72-500s last November to replace a pair of aging ATR72-200s and plans to have a medium-haul jet by 2012, in time for Visit Laos Year. Chanthaphasouk said the airline would decide early this year whether to lease an Airbus A320 aircraft or purchase a 90-seat Chinese ART21. The new aircraft will service Bangkok, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Kunming. "We may also use it to open a Guangxi-Kunming-Vientiane route."

Malaysia Airlines

By S Puvaneswary

Malaysia Airlines (MAS) reported an operating profit of RM3.9 million (US\$1.26 million) for the first half of last year.

MAS launched thrice-weekly flights from Kuala Lumpur to Dammam, Saudi Arabia, via Dubai on May 5. Daily flights were introduced between Kuala Lumpur and Bandung, Indonesia on July 16. New too to the network were thrice-weekly flights from Kota Kinabalu to Haneda from November 15 and a thrice-weekly service between Kuala Lumpur and Riyadh from December 17.

On January 15, MAS will launch four-weekly flights between Kuching and Seoul via Kota Kinabalu as well as thrice-weekly flights between Kota Kinabalu and Perth.

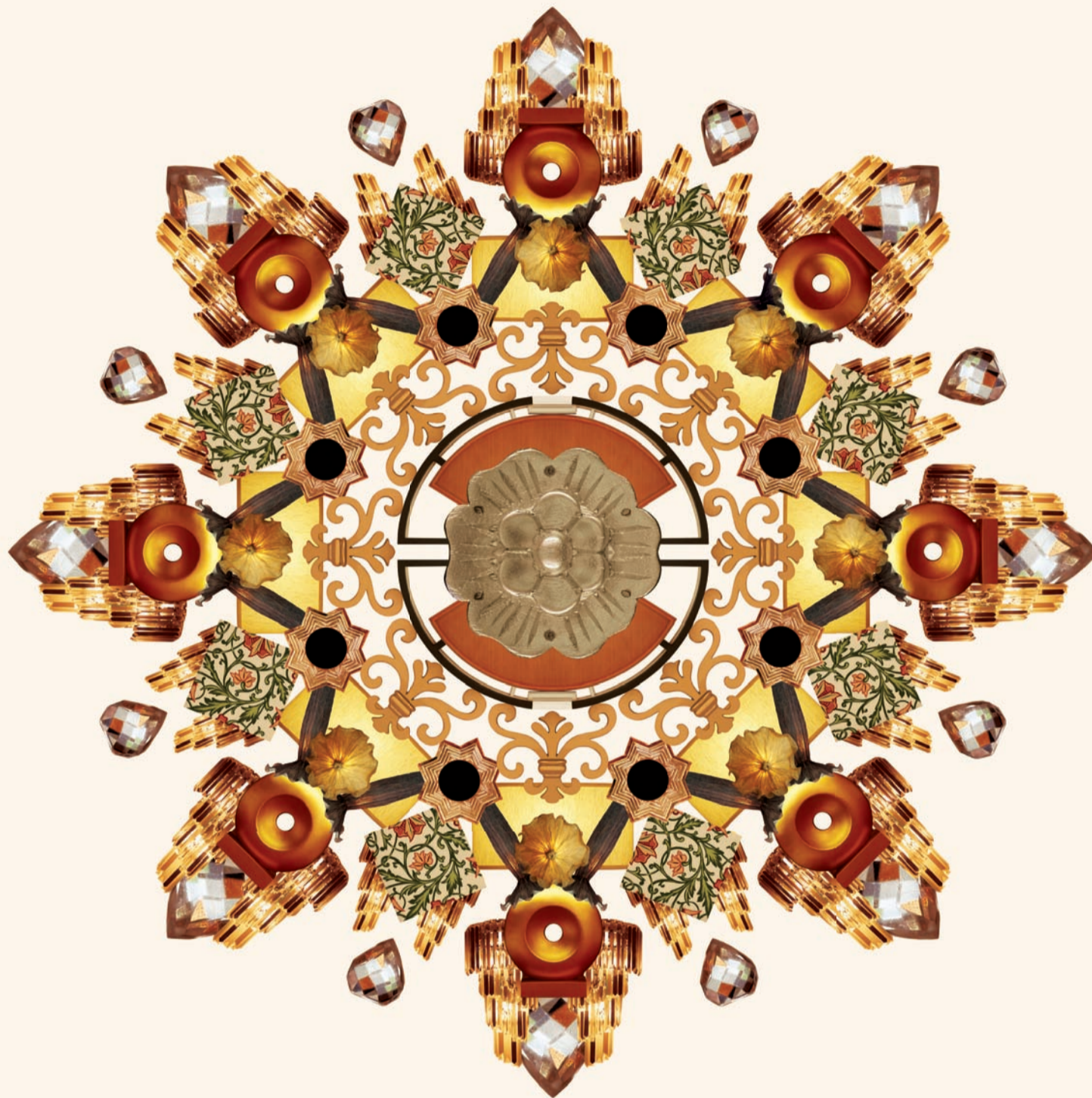
The second quarter was particularly strong, with the group's total revenue jumping 26 per cent to RM3.2 billion, compared to RM2.5 billion in the same period in 2009. Operating profit climbed 33 percentage points, while passenger revenue grew by 22 per cent year-on-year to RM2.3 billion, from RM1.9 billion, as MAS upped capacity by five per cent. Traffic rose by 18 per cent, and yield got a two per cent boost.

The airline will take delivery of 35 Boeing B737-800s in stages from the last quarter of 2010 to October 2011. Replacing MAS' fleet of B737-400s, the fuel-efficient B737-800s, with a six-hour flight range, will be deployed on domestic and Asian routes. They will likewise be considered for possible new routes in China, Japan, India and South Korea.

MAS has also ordered six A380s for high-density sectors such as London and Sydney. The first A380 will be delivered in 2012.



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Performance

Myanmar Airways International

By Rahul Khanna

Despite strong competition from legacy and low-cost carriers, Myanmar Airways International (MAI) enjoyed a good year-to-date performance up to October 2010, said the airline's assistant general manager Ye Jhan.

According to Jhan, MAI dominated the traffic on the Yangon-Kuala Lumpur route with a 56 per cent marketshare. On the Yangon-Bangkok sector, MAI's share was just 20 per cent due to strong competition from Thai Airways International, Bangkok Airways and Thai AirAsia. MAI's marketshare on the Yangon-Singapore route, which SilkAir also plies, was 33 per cent.

Network

MAI kicked off its regional expansion last year with daily Bangkok-Singapore flights in November and a thrice-weekly Yangon-Guangzhou service introduced before year-end. These new points beefed up MAI's regional network that already included Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Gaya in India.

MAI's Yangon-Kuala Lumpur sector got an additional weekly service from end-October, bringing the airline's flights to the Malaysian capital to six. The daily Yangon-Bangkok flight also became a twice-daily service from end-October.

Expansion

MAI will expand its regional network further this year with direct flights from Yangon to Macau, Kunming, Jakarta and Bali. Also in the works is a charter flight service that tour operators can avail of for group tours in the region.

Upon delivery of its new Airbus A320 this year, MAI will have a fleet of four aircraft. The airline has two A320s and one A321. It took delivery of the latter end-October last year.

Philippine Airlines

By Ollie Quiniqini

Philippine Airlines (PAL) earned 2.44 billion pesos (US\$55.6 million) in profits from April to September 2010, the first half of its fiscal year 2010-2011.

Passenger traffic grew by 16.4 per cent during this period while yield improved by 13.4 per cent. Revenues reached 37.52 billion pesos.

The airline enjoyed a particularly strong second quarter (July to September 2010), raking in US\$28.2 million in profits, courtesy of a 33 per cent jump in revenues to US\$399.5 million. Expenses, however, grew seven per cent to US\$371.2 million due to higher fuel costs and aircraft lease rentals, among others.

PAL relaunched services to Brisbane in March 2010, only to pull out of the sector seven months later.

The airline operated twice-weekly Manila-Melbourne-Brisbane-Manila flights on Airbus A330-300s, but weak demand led it to suspend the service on October 31. Manila-Melbourne flights were also cut down to thrice-weekly from the previous five.

Riyadh was the other addition to PAL's network last year. The carrier resumed four-weekly services to the Saudi Arabian city on March 28, 2010, after an absence of around four years.

PAL will add India to its network with six-weekly flights to New Delhi from March 28. Of the six, three will be nonstop flights and the other three, via Bangkok.

PAL president and COO, Jaime Bautista, said: "In 2011, Philippine Airlines will launch a new route to New Delhi, opening up the Philippines to the enormous and high-potential Indian outbound market. Starting operations to new markets in the past like South Korea, Japan, China, Canada and the US has helped boost tourism (to the Philippines) and we expect the same to happen in India."

Singapore Airlines

By Gracia Chiang

Singapore Airlines (SIA) earned an operating profit of S\$380 million (US\$296 million) from April to September 2010, the first half of its 2010-2011 financial year. This was a turnaround from an operating loss of S\$428 million in 2009.

Targets for 2011 were not available but an SIA spokesperson said demand patterns and forward bookings had been encouraging, with the business class market returning particularly strongly.

He added that SIA was now adding new routes and reinstating capacity that was cut during the 2009 economic downturn.

SIA launched five-weekly flights to Munich on March 28 last year and turned this into a daily service from September 1. It also introduced twice-daily flights to Tokyo Haneda on October 31, complementing its existing daily services to Tokyo Narita.

Capacity was beefed up on several sectors, including Hong Kong, New Delhi, Colombo, Dhaka, Mumbai and Seoul.

SIA's all-Business Class services to Newark and Los Angeles returned to daily operations, from five times a week, in January and October respectively.

SIA, however, suspended twice-weekly operations to Pakistan and Nanjing.

SIA will add a sixth continent to its route network in March with the launch of thrice-weekly flights between Singapore and Sao Paulo, via Barcelona. This makes SIA the only carrier with direct flights between South-east Asia and Brazil.

SIA presently flies daily between Singapore and Barcelona via Milan. In March, three of these flights will operate non-stop between Singapore and Barcelona en route to Sao Paulo. Milan will remain a daily service with the introduction of new thrice-weekly non-stop Singapore-Milan flights.

The airline expects to take delivery of up to seven Airbus A380s this year.

Thai Airways International

By Sirima Eamtako

In the first eight months of 2010, Thai Airways International (THAI) had an average cabin factor of 73.7 per cent, a 2.5 per cent increase over the same period in 2009. Available seat kilometre (ASK) rose 5.9 per cent while revenue passenger kilometre (RPK) registered an 8.6 per cent increase.

In September alone, THAI's ASK and RPK grew by 3.8 per cent and 2.5 per cent respectively, and cabin factor averaged 73.4 per cent.

THAI's net profit for the first half of 2010 was 12.3 billion baht (US\$410 million), 4.8 billion baht more than in the same period in 2009.

THAI reinstated its Bangkok-Johannesburg service with four-weekly flights in June, after suspending the service in January 2009. It also added a new daily service between Bangkok and Tokyo Haneda from October 31, on top of its existing thrice-daily flights to Tokyo Narita.

For the winter season 2010-2011 from October 31 to March 26, THAI has increased frequencies on its Bangkok services to Nagoya, Fukuoka, Kolkata, Mumbai, Sydney, Moscow and Oslo.

THAI intends to increase frequency on well-performing routes and establish a young fleet with an average age of eight years by 2024.

The airline is undergoing a fleet renewal and aircraft retrofitting programme that will see 24 aging aircraft decommissioned by 2024. Fifteen new aircraft – seven Airbus A330-300s and eight Boeing B777-300ERs – will be delivered between 2011 and 2013. Six A380-800s will join the fleet between 2012 and 2013. Aircraft that have been operating for at least five years will be retrofitted between 2012 and 2013.

THAI has also entered into a 51:49 joint venture with Tiger Airways to form Thai Tiger Airways, which is expected to take off in March this year.

Vietnam Airlines

By Sirima Eamtako

Vietnam Airlines (VNA) aims to become South-east Asia's third top airline by 2015 and second best by 2020. Operating 75 routes to 20 domestic and 26 international destinations, it expects to generate revenues of VND32.2 trillion (US\$1.65 billion) and a net profit of VND151 billion in 2010.

VNA officially joined SkyTeam in June 2010 and introduced several new routes last year. These included services from Hanoi to Yangon, Shanghai and Osaka, from Ho Chi Minh City to Yangon and Shanghai, and from Danang to Hong Kong. Also added to the network was a new Danang-Ho Chi Minh City-Narita service. The Ho Chi Minh City-Nagoya route was also revived last year.

Frequency was boosted on the Ho Chi Minh City-Tokyo and Hanoi-Osaka sectors, while a codeshare agreement with Air France added six flights to the existing seven on the Paris-Vietnam sector.

New domestic routes included flights from Hanoi to Vinh and Chu Lai. Ho Chi Minh City-Can Tho-Phu Quoc and Ho Chi Minh City-Danang-Da Lat services also joined the network.

VNA plans to develop more routes to ASEAN destinations as well as cities in South Asia, North-east Asia and the South Pacific. In the planning stage are new services to Indonesia and the Philippines between 2011 and 2013, and to India between 2013 and 2016. Flights to the Americas and Africa are on the drawing board.

VNA will also boost capacity between Vietnam and Russia, adding two more flights a week this year to the existing five. It presently operates thrice-weekly Ho Chi Minh City-Moscow and twice-weekly Hanoi-Moscow flights.

The airline's fleet is set to grow to 115 aircraft by 2015 and 165 by 2020, with delivery in phases of eight Boeing B787 Dreamliners and 10 to 12 Airbus A350-900s. VNA's fleet presently comprises 70 aircraft.

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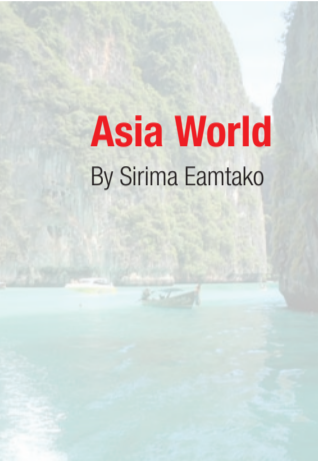
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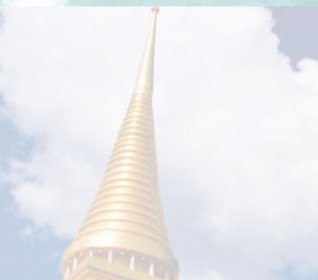
Going the regional way

Travel agents and tour operators in the region are looking beyond their borders and expanding aggressively into ASEAN markets as they capitalise on the ever growing demand for intraregional travel. **TTG Asia ATF 2011 Daily** looks at who has gone where, when and why...



Asia World

By Sirima Eamtako



Buffalo Tours

By Sirima Eamtako



Destination Asia

By Sirima Eamtako



Home base

Established in Bangkok in 1997, Asia World has grown into a major DMC for Thailand, with a team of 200 and operations offices in Bangkok, Phuket, Koh Samui, Krabi, Pattaya, Hua Hin/Cha-am and Chiang Mai. It also has a fleet of 40 vehicles – sedans, minivans, minibuses.

With sales representative offices in the UK, the US, Australia and Germany, Asia World services a clientele that hails mainly from the UK, the US, Europe and Australia. The company handled 70,000 passengers for Thailand in 2009 and expected to close 2010 with 100,000 passengers.

The DMC has created specific brands for its varied portfolio. These include Asia World Chic for the high-end market, Asia World Destination Management for incentives and events of up to 2,000 delegates and Asia World Online Booking System (ICOM) for 24/7 live bookings at 1,500 hotels in Thailand.

The Hanoi-based company has its roots in adventure travel. A Vietnamese doctor with a passion for travel, Tran Trong Kien, founded Buffalo Tours in 1994, handling 150 clients and bringing in US\$150,000 in revenue that first year as an adventure tour operator.

Through the years, Buffalo Tours has evolved into a boutique tour operator that champions responsible tourism operations. Australia, the UK, the US, Europe and Russia are its main markets.

Buffalo Tours has its own sales offices in London and Sydney, a sales representative in Moscow and a sales team fluent in German, French and Spanish, among others, at its head office.

In 2009, Buffalo Tours handled 35,000 clients, grew its 250-man team to 350, and earned US\$20 million to US\$25 million, 29 per cent more than the previous year.

Destination Asia started in Bangkok in 1996 as a DMC handling tours in Thailand and Vietnam.

The group has since expanded to cover Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Myanmar and Laos. It has sales offices in all its key markets – the US, the UK, Australia and Europe (Germany and Spain). Its home base Thailand, however, remains the group's main destination, said co-founder, CEO and group managing director James Reed.

According to Reed, Destination Asia's core competency is its common ownerships with individual shareholders and management teams in each destination, resulting in a "family" business environment. This allows it to make prompt decisions, unlike companies owned by airlines or European tour operators. The group's combined contracting and ownership of licences in each destination arm Destination Asia with competitive pricing and quality control over products and services, Reed added.

"We are also the only regional tour operator that specialises in all inbound market segments, including incentives, cruises, corporate business and tour wholesalers/operators," said Reed.

Expansion

Asia World managing director Stephen McEvoy started exploring regional opportunities in April 2009 when he co-founded the Asian Connections alliance.

This strategic marketing partnership has since grown from its four major and three smaller partners at inception to 11 members today. The alliance is in the process of signing up new partners from South Korea, the Maldives, the Philippines and Mongolia, among others.

McEvoy eventually applied the regional principle to Asia World by entering into a joint venture with Bali-based Buaya Travel Indonesia, which was rebranded as Asia World Indonesia in August 2010. This was followed by the establishment of Asia World Sri Lanka in October, when McEvoy increased his stake in the former Lanka World Travel to 49 per cent, from the previous 32 per cent. That same month, the company set up a dedicated MICE division, Asia World Destination Management, to handle clients' requirements in Thailand, Indochina and Indonesia.

Vietnam was Buffalo Tours' bailiwick for 15 years but the company eventually decided to test the waters in neighbouring markets.

Buffalo Tours set up its own operations offices in Cambodia, Thailand and Laos over 12 to 18 months from early 2009.

It replaced its joint venture with Intrepid Indochina with a dedicated office in Siem Reap in March 2009. In Thailand, it acquired North by North East (NXNE) Tours in Nakorn Phanom in April 2009 and established a Bangkok office in June. It also set up an office in Luang Prabang in January 2010. To strengthen its presence in the UK, Buffalo Tours opened an office in London in September 2010.

Tran is not stopping there. He plans to run tourism operations in Australia, the US, Europe and the rest of Asia by 2015, and open more sales offices in key source markets. Details, however, were not available at press time.

Destination Asia Singapore started operations in October 2010 while Destination Asia Malaysia is slated to be up and running early this year.

Both outfits are being set up by Pacific World retirees Bob and Gillian Guy, in a joint venture with Reed and Destination Asia (Thailand) managing director Pornthip Hirunkate.

As with Destination Asia's eight other offices, the additions in Singapore and Malaysia will handle all four inbound market segments – incentives, cruises, corporate business and tour wholesalers/operators.

"We expect significant growth in sales revenue across all 10 destinations this year."

Expectations

McEvoy expects inter-Asian leisure travel to become a core part of Asia World's business as new local offices build up their clientele.

While Asia World already has a foothold in the inter-regional MICE sector through the Asian Connections alliance, Asia World Destination Management is still keen to get a bigger slice of the Asian MICE market.

ICOM was relaunched at World Travel Market 2010 in London as an Asia-wide solution that allows bookings at more than 5,000 hotel rooms in Asia. Asian Connections XML guru Dan Tilley has been roped in to connect international B2B operators to the system.

McEvoy said the appointment of new sales representative offices in France, Spain and South Africa for both Asia World and Asian Connections would expand the market for the two entities.

"A target of 120,000 clients is the challenge that Asia World has set for itself in 2011," said McEvoy.

Buoyed by a 38 per cent increase in passengers from all markets to Vietnam in 2010, Tran was bullish about market prospects in the coming year.

"We are executing our plans well and these have started delivering positive results – increasing sales and profitability, delighting customers and making staff happy. We hope to keep this momentum going as we move into 2011," he said.

Tran Trong Kien is not stopping there. He plans to run tourism operations in Australia, the US, Europe and the rest of Asia by 2015

Reed said the Destination Asia expansion drive is ongoing, with more destinations in Asia to be added to the network this year.

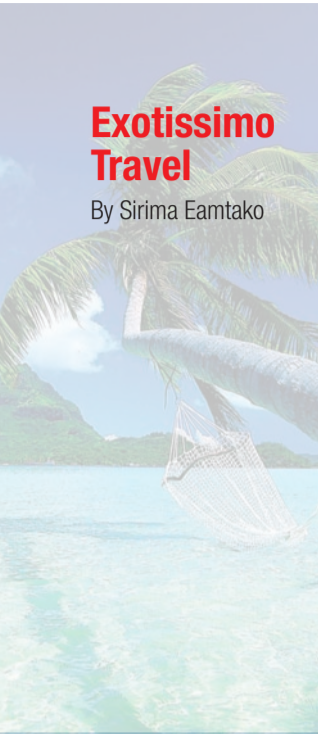
At press time, the group was looking at a 23 per cent growth in sales revenue across its eight destinations in 2010.

James Reed
Destination Asia
CEO and group managing director



Exotissimo Travel

By Sirima Eamtako



Home base

Exotissimo Travel was the first foreign company to be granted a tourism operating licence in Vietnam. It set up shop in Ho Chi Minh City in 1993 and later expanded to offer destination management services in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand. Exotissimo subsequently moved its headquarters to Bangkok in August 2007 as the Thai capital was the most central location for its five destinations, and client locations in the US, Europe, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, explained group COO Hamish Keith.

The DMC now has nearly 500 full-time staff and 16 offices in six countries including Indonesia – its latest addition in 2010. It also offers travel agency services for domestic travel and ticketing in Thailand and Vietnam.

Keith said the Exotissimo Group's USP was its ability to handle a wide range of clients for niche market segments such as meetings and incentives, experiential travels and soft-adventure activities.

Expansion

The company has ventured beyond its Indo-china comfort zone and into Indonesia. It took over Bali-based Maniara Tours in October 2009 and relaunched it as Exotissimo Travel Indonesia in January 2010.

This month, Exotissimo Travel Japan was established with a registered capital of US\$250,000 and became the group's first wholly-owned set-up. Offices in six existing locations are under a shareholding structure.

Exotissimo also became a Virtuoso On-Site for Thailand last year. It has been a Virtuoso On-Site for Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar since 2008.

The DMC has also expanded its presence in the US by appointing a North American market coordinator and launching a B2B website for clients.

Expectations

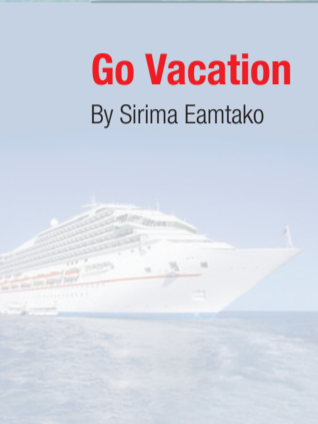
Keith said Exotissimo entered Indonesia and Japan as it had identified opportunities "especially in the high-end experiential, tailor-made, personalised market segment – (as we believe) we are the leader in this field in Asia".

The group expects to handle a total of 90,000 clients in six destinations in 2010 and 100,000 clients in seven destinations in 2011, said Keith.

CEO Olivier Colomès said: "All Exotissimo destinations are expected to see a healthy growth in 2011."

Go Vacation

By Sirima Eamtako



Part of the German REWE Group, Go Vacation entered the Asian DMC scene in 1983 as LTU Asia Tours. It was originally set up to provide airport passenger handling services and package tour arrangements in Thailand for German carrier LTU International Airlines and clients of its subsidiary tour operator LTU Touristic GmbH.

In February 2007, LTU Asia Tours changed its name to Go Vacation Thailand following a joint venture with Bali-based Go Vacation Indonesia. That same year, the Air Berlin group took over LTU International Airlines and merged it with Air Berlin. Go Vacation Thailand then became the brand for tour operations and inbound business while LTU Asia remained the tradename for the airline and GSA business.

Go Vacation Thailand is now one of the country's top five inbound operators, with eight domestic offices and more than 270 employees. It services some 200,000 travellers annually from the German REWE Group, cruises, events and other accounts from Europe, the US, the Middle East, Asia and South Africa.

Last year, the DER Group (part of the REWE Group) entered into a joint venture with Sri Lanka's Jetwing Travels to set up Go Vacation Sri Lanka.

The new outfit started operations in October, handling primarily REWE, Meier's Weltreisen and DERTOUR accounts. DER's share in the Sri Lankan venture is held by Go Vacation Thailand, following a model similar to that of Go Vacation Indonesia. Go Vacation Thailand managing director Christoph Mueller is on the board of the ventures in Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Go Vacation Thailand has also diversified its portfolio by forming a dedicated group and events department in September 2009 to handle cruise and events business. The company had won the Thailand groundhandling account for AIDA Cruises for two consecutive years.

Passenger volume of Go Vacation Indonesia has doubled since the company was formed in 2007, said Mueller. On its part, Go Vacation Sri Lanka is expected to handle 15,000 passengers in its first year of operation.

On the cruise front, Go Vacation Thailand is confident of bagging the AIDA Cruises account for the third year in a row. The German cruise company operated 13 ships with some 1,200 passengers each to Thailand in 2009. Last year, it deployed 14 ships, each with a handling capacity of 1,500 passengers. The cruise company is expected to bring even bigger ships to the region this year.

Passenger volume of Go Vacation Indonesia has doubled since the company was formed in 2007, said Christoph Mueller

Panorama Tours

By Mimi Hudoyo



The outbound arm of Panorama Leisure Group, Panorama Tours, was formed in 1998 to cover leisure, incentive, retail and corporate travel.

Headquartered in Jakarta, it has 19 branch offices in the Indonesian capital and four outside Jakarta, four corporate travel centres and 12 Panorama World franchise retailfronts in six cities, including Jakarta.

"Indonesia's outbound market is very dynamic. We choose not to specialise in particular destinations but let the market dictate preferences instead, depending on interest," said managing director Rama Tirtawisata.

As it aspires to become a regional and international player, Panorama Tours has opened offices in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Set up in 2009, Panorama Tours Malaysia is a joint venture with Richard Vuilleumier and caters largely to incentive business. Panorama Tours Singapore, formed with Chan Brothers early last year, focuses primarily on outbound leisure.

Tirtawisata explained: "When entering a new market, we need to have a partner who understands the destination."

The two offices are starting off with handling Indonesian traffic to Singapore and Malaysia but will eventually offer full-fledged inbound and outbound travel services.

"Singapore and Malaysia are both destinations and source markets," said Tirtawisata.

Tirtawisata has high hopes for Panorama Tours' two offices in the region as intra-ASEAN travel gains ground and access within the region improves.

Panorama Tours Malaysia catered to 3,000 outbound and 3,000 inbound clients year-to-date 2010. It is targeting 10,000 inbound passengers and 5,000 outbound passengers, of which 4,000 will be MICE clients, this year.

Tirtawisata expects Panorama Tours Singapore to handle 3,000 arrivals from Indonesia over the next six months, "less than 30 per cent of the total passenger volume for Panorama Tours Indonesia in 2010".

Growth targets are much higher this year, with the Singapore office budgeted to handle 20,000 inbound and outbound passengers.

Red Apple Travel & Tours

By S Puvaneswary



Malaysia-based Red Apple Travel & Tours specialises in Indian subcontinent traffic to Asia.

Formed in 2005, it employs 21 people and has a fleet of eight vans and two limousines.

In 2009, Red Apple handled some 15,000 clients in Malaysia. The bulk of the business was group series with fixed departures, followed by ad hoc leisure groups and FITs.

Managing director Arokia Das Anthony said Red Apple would open an office in Bali this June and one in Phnom Penh in 2012. Both offices will be joint ventures with a local partner and Mumbai-based Suneet Goenka, who heads Red Apple Travel India. The offices will initially handle inbound traffic from the Indian subcontinent before eventually going into outbound.

Noting that Bali and Phnom Penh were still emerging destinations for the Indian market, Arokia Das said: "By entering (these cities) early, we'll be able to grow our presence without much competition and ultimately become the top operator in Bali and Phnom Penh for the Indian subcontinent."

Red Apple's regional expansion stems from Arokia Das' desire to broaden the company's offerings while maintaining quality control.

Arokia Das said he had to decline business from India to Bali and Indochina in the past as he could not guarantee service standards. "With our own offices, we will be able to maintain high standards."

The company is targeting 5,000 arrivals in both destinations in the first year of operations, with volume doubling in the second year. "We hope to subsequently see a year-on-year growth of 20 per cent," said Arokia Das.

Getting a taste of local flavour

Delegates were treated to dose of Cambodian culture at the opening ceremony. Pictures by **Patrick Tan**



Hotel Cambodiana's Pierre Bernard and Himawari Hotel Apartments' Ben Bala



Dorison Travel Singapore's Jimmy Sim and Star Vacations (Group) Singapore's Casey Wee with local hosts



Casa Boutique Hotel Phnom Penh's Willie Peh, Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Nim Sovann and Casa Boutique Hotel Phnom Penh's Richard Cheung



Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration's Qi Yongjiang, Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Tith Chantha and Yin Nat, and Pacific Asia Tourism Australia's Steve Noakes



Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Hul Seila (middle)



Vidotour Indochina Travel's Om Vothy Rith and Tran Trong Dinh Khoi

Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts Thailand's Christina Bartz and Mövenpick Hotel Saigon's Emelyn Mauhay



Bell Travel Italy's Rosario Campione (right)



Ministry of Information Cambodia's Keo Phan (right)

Indonesia's Minister of Culture and Tourism Jero Wacik and his wife



TTG Media's Darren Ng, The Frangipani Langkawi Resort & Spa's Wong Peng Jun, Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel's Anthony Wong and The Frangipani Langkawi Resort & Spa's Wong Lye Kwan



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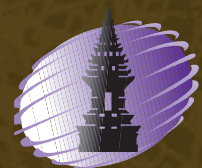
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