

## Myanmar: open for business

Tourism ministry signals change, bringing optimism to the travel trade

By Shekhar Niyogi

A FAR-SIGHTED new government in Myanmar has revealed that it is studying the implementation of several tourist-friendly changes in the areas of hotel development, air access and visas.

Policies are in place to develop infrastructure in six regions including Yangon, Bagan, Inle and Mandalay.

U Htay Aung, deputy minister, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, told the *Daily* that the country's land allocation and leasing policies are being relooked, including extending the duration of leases from two to at least five years.

He said: "There are 25 foreign investment-backed hotels here,

and we may see a deluge if some of the policy changes take effect. We now charge US\$200,000 or a percentage of gross revenue as a fee, whichever is higher. We are working on a formula that will be attractive to new overseas investors."

According to U Aung Zaw Win, director general, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, a target to build 24,000 guestrooms in the budget, two- and three-star categories over the next few years has been set.

Illustrating the destination's dire need for rooms, he said the country's 739 hotels were all booked out till March.

U Aung Zaw Win expects ar-



**U Aung Zaw Win: all maxed out**

rivals to grow 35 per cent this year to achieve 1.2 million foot-falls.

This may not be out of reach, given that in just the last two months of

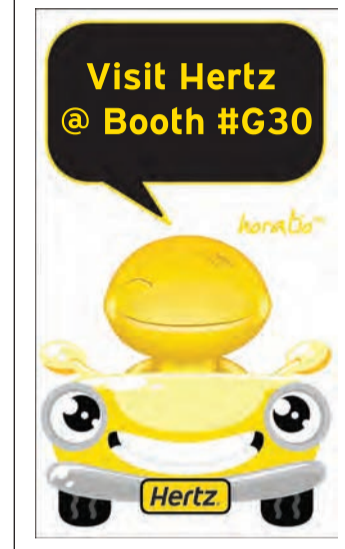
2011, there was a 27 per cent leap in arrivals, compared to the same period in 2010.

Aside from infrastructure, the *Daily* has also learned that a proposal to scrap tax on all incoming flights has been submitted to the government. If successful,

Myanmar can expect busier skies – six domestic carriers and 15 foreign airlines already serve the destination. Myanmar Airways International and Air Bagan are also slated to begin flights to new destinations soon under the ASEAN Open Sky pact, a development which is expected to augment the large volume of ASEAN tourists that Myanmar is already attracting.

Myanmar's largest ASEAN source market is Thailand (15.8 per cent), which ranks close to the destination's top traffic contributor, China (15.9 per cent).

Meanwhile, an effort to cut turnaround time for pre-arrival visa applications is also under



way. Presently, the country grants visas on arrival to passengers arriving on cruises and charter flights, as well as to package tour travellers from countries where Myanmar has no diplomatic representation.

### Flag carrier spurs Myanmar's aviation growth

MYANMAR'S airline sector is finally soaring after suffering three lacklustre years and the grounding of Yangon Airways in 2010.

In a dramatic reversal of fortunes, 2011 saw airlines serving the destination adding new routes, new airlines opening and Yangon Airways regaining permission to fly. Today, flag carrier Myanmar Airways International (MAI) faces competition from many Asian airlines including Thai Airways International, Bangkok Airways, SilkAir and AirAsia.

However, despite stiff competition, MAI grew its regional network in last year. It launched a twice-weekly Yangon-Siem Reap service, which later became a circuit route with stops in Phnom Penh, and a twice-weekly Yangon-Guangzhou service. It currently also has regular flights to Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Gaya.

According to MAI spokesperson, Aye Mra Tha, the airline intends to acquire more aircraft to support its route and capacity expansion, which includes new services to Jakarta, New Delhi, Tokyo, Seoul, Dubai, Doha and Bali. – **Rahul Khanna**

## NATAS to lead missions

By Linda Haden

THE NATIONAL Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS) has taken over the lead in giving Singapore a face at some major travel tradeshows this year, following the Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) move to cut back on its tradeshows presence. Inbound players are worried that this may be symptomatic of STB's gradual withdrawal of local trade support.

STB's decision to skip major tourism events such as GIBTM, WTM and ATM in 2011 struck a raw nerve with the trade and many have interpreted the move as a snub.

According to a statement from STB to the *Daily*, attendance at AIME, ITB Berlin, IMEX Frankfurt and IMEX America in 2012 have been confirmed to date, fewer than last year, when the NTO chose to exhibit in at least eight major tradeshows.

NATAS' initiative, which is being evaluated, is spearheaded by Samson Tan, CEO of travel group GTMC Holdings and a

member of the association's inbound sub-committee. It will see eight to 10 travel companies, three to four attractions and up to 10 hotels heading to key trade events such as ATM, WTM and CITM under the NATAS banner this year. Participation



**Lim: tradeshows still important**

rates are expected to be slightly higher than what STB charges – between S\$3,500 (US\$2,708) and S\$9,000 depending on location – as NATAS does not have pockets deep enough to subsidise trips.

To minimise the initial financial outlay associated with tradeshows participation, NATAS has applied for subsidies under the International Marketing Activities Programme administered by International Enterprise Singapore (IE). If the application is successful, NATAS stands to receive up to 70 per cent relief from IE to cover expenses incurred for space rental and booth construction, among others.

Continued on page 4

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# Gearing up for a great mart

Buyers and sellers arrive in Manado and stream in for registration. **Patrick Tan** catches the early birds



Independence Hotel Resort & Spa Cambodia's Thomas Lam and Dara Hotels & Resorts Cambodia's Michael Lim



World Express Singapore's Jimmy Sim and Travel Smart Malaysia's Eric Lau



Blue Pacific Tours & Travel Malaysia's Anne Tan and The Traveling Eye US' Gene Harley



Complete India & Asia UK's Margaret and Stuart Miller



Privilege Tours Hungary's Agnes Gonda and TTG Asia's Mark Wee



Golden Eagle Travel & Tours' Maria Michelle Reyes-Victoria, Amkor Travel & Tours' Mari-ann Malinao-Tismo and BC Travel Services' Weng Balmes-Catalan, all from the Philippines



Aerowisata Senggigi Beach Hotel Indonesia's Ida Bagus Okayana and Asean Resort Net Japan's Eiji Ogata

Global Meeting UK's Sonia Rose and Rose Arnold Marketing UK's Clifford Rose



Wild Card Adventures US' Scott Wild



Bintan Resorts International's Asad Shiraz



SunBird Tours Myanmar's Werner Rumpf and Mercure Vientiane Twinkle Turqueza



# Philippines holds breath on tax

More airline pull-outs could hurt the destination, with European demand already a question mark

By Marianne Carandang

THE LOCAL travel trade is hoping that the Philippine lawmakers will approve the abolishment of an airline tax, which has been roundly criticised for its detrimental effect on the destination.

KLM – the last carrier to operate direct flights from Europe to the Philippines – recently announced it would add an intermediate stop in either Hong Kong or Taipei to its Amsterdam-Manila route from April. This means that the number of seats from Amsterdam to Manila will be drastically reduced as capacity will be shared by both cities.

This situation is compounded by the fact that Philippine carriers are not permitted to fly to Europe due to an EU ban.

Cees Ursem, Air France-KLM general manager South China Sea, attributed the decision to the financial burden dealt by two taxes – the common carrier tax (CCT), a three per cent business tax on gross receipts, and a 2.5 per cent gross Philippine billings tax.

Stephen Crowdey, first vice chairman of the Board of Airline Representatives, said that “less non-stop capacity significantly reduces the appeal of the Philippines for the trade and tourists alike,” a concern shared by inbound travel companies.

Philippine Travel Agencies Association president, Aileen Clemente, explained: “The Philippines will be reliant on flights connecting through other Asian cities, which may be the deciding factor for

tourists from Europe, (who may) just conclude their trip in an Asian hub of their chosen airline.”

Added Ursem: “Our crew will not stay in Manila from April. Currently, they stay

in Hotel Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila and occupy 11,000 roomnights per year.”

Speaking to the *Daily*, Department of Tourism secretary Ramon R Jimenez pointed out that the Department of Fi-

nance had agreed not to oppose to a revision of the laws governing the CCT. A final decision, which will be made by Congress, is expected in June. – **Additional reporting by Sim Kok Chwee and Linda Haden**

“Seat capacity will be affected, and there will be a domino effect, resulting in fare increases.”

**Helen Hao**

President

Philippine IATA Agents Travel Association

## In brief

### First China charters for Manado

MANADO will receive charter flights from Guangzhou this month, the first direct charter service from China.

Operated by Batavia Air's 180-seat Airbus A320 aircraft, the first flight will touch down on January 23 with 170 passengers, while the second – which has not been filled – will arrive on January 26.

Manado-based Mapanget Mega Wisata Tours and Travel managing director, Reinaldo Wangkar, said: “I have learned that Batavia Air is testing the waters, as they are planning to launch regular services between China and Manado. We do hope that our products suit the market.”

The regional government has been vocal about trying to attract more direct flights from the region, as Manado is only served by SilkAir from Singapore.

At a press conference on the sidelines of ATF, governor of North Sulawesi, Sinyo Harry Sarundajang, said: “We would also like to have better access between Japan and Manado, through the Philippines.”

He also expects Lion Air's regional expansion to bring more tourists to Manado, which is already connected to Bali by flights. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

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# ITPB to finally kick off

Indonesia's private sector-run promotion board replaces the defunct predecessor

By Mimi Hudoyo

THE NEW Indonesia Tourism Promotion Board (ITPB), run independently by the private sector, has been formed to support the government's destination promotion efforts and to replace the former IPTB which became inactive in the early 2000s.

ITPB will receive a seed fund of 23 billion rupiah (US\$2.6 million) from the authorities, which can only be used on destination promotion programmes.

Indonesia's deputy minister of tourism and creative economy, Sapta Nirwandar, said the fund was the government's way of investing in ITPB, which "will need to generate income to develop more programmes".

ITPB will start off with three key programmes, focusing on generating arrivals during low season, and developing creative tourism and green tourism.

Detailed programmes are being drawn up and will be presented to the minister of tourism and creative economy after ATF.

ITPB chairman, Wiryanti Sukamdani, said the role of the new body would not overlap with that of the ministry's directorate general of marketing.

**"We do need a (tourism) board run by professionals who truly understand how the industry works and what we need."**

**Iwan Sitompul**

General manager and corporate director of sales and marketing  
Cocotinos Hotel Group

She explained that ITPB's three-prong programme will serve to strengthen the government's own initiatives.

For example, when the government arranges for Indonesia's

participation in international travel marts, ITPB may jump in to buy more exhibition space and arrange for more trade representation if a larger presence is determined to be more beneficial.

"We may also organise roadshows to grow traffic during low seasons," she said.

However, Wiryanti clarified that it was not ITPB's job to break into new markets, as that was the responsibility of the government.

South Sulawesi Tourism Board vice chairman, Nico Pasaka, said: "I'm confident that the board members are people who are dedicated to the development of tourism, but I feel that there are a couple of things that might cause hindrance."

Nico elaborated: "The board needs to generate income which will come from the private sector. How much can that be, compared to the budget put up by neighbouring destinations such as Singapore and Malaysia, for example?"

"Secondly, the various Indonesian regions have their own tourism promotion board. Will ITPB get support from these regional boards?"

Wiryanti acknowledged the importance of cooperation with regional boards, and said that such links already exist.

She explained: "Regional boards count tourism industry entities such as hotels and travel agent associations as members. So does ITPB. Therefore, I'm confident of achieving cooperation with the regional boards."

Cocotinos Hotel Group general manager and corporate director of sales and marketing, Iwan Sitompul, welcomed the birth of the new ITPB, saying: "We do need a board run by professionals who truly understand how the industry works and what we need."

"As long as it has clear programmes and targets, and can execute these programmes well, I'm sure it will garner support from the industry."

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## History in the making for India and ASEAN

India and ASEAN have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will lead to cooperation on various aspects including human resource, infrastructure development, bilateral investment in hospitality and tourism, increase in flights and technology transfer. The move, aimed at growing each other's tourism business, had met with a brief hiccup when objections arose over the terminology on data sharing, which was rectified. Read more in the *ATF Daily* tomorrow. – **Shekhar Niyogi**

## Korea's hot ASEAN year

TOURISM cooperation between ASEAN and South Korea took a turn for the better in 2011, with the latter implementing measures that paved the way for more ASEAN arrivals.

With South Korea's visa system seen as a major obstacle to growing ASEAN arrivals, the destination's authorities cut the number of supporting documents required, introduced double-entry and family-unit visas, relaxed conditions for multiple-entry visas and extended visa validity periods for travellers from Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos from last April.

As a result, 459,300 travellers from these markets visited South Korea between April and November last year, an improvement from the 555,012 arrivals in 2010. Cambodia registered the

biggest growth (70.1 per cent), while the Philippines accounted for the lion's share.

Last year also saw the opening of Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) offices in Hanoi and Jakarta. Another will open in Manila before June.

The destination also hosted two travel trade personnel from each of the 10 ASEAN member countries on a 10-week training programme from October till December. There were lessons on the Korean language, culture and tourism strategies, as well as tour inspections, site visits and sustainable tourism seminars.

Kwon Jong Sool, KTO Jakarta office director, said the programme focused on improving the capacity of tourism stakeholders and sharing trade expertise in promoting South Korea. – **Brian Higgs**

Continued from page 1

## STB's selective tradeshow participation worries local trade players

Tan expects a decision from IE by April.

"It is difficult and costly for members to participate in tradeshow on their own. It would be best if we went as a team," he said.

However, he conceded that "STB's presence would add more gravitas to events that our members exhibit in".

Travel professionals were also miffed that STB had increased exhibitor rates for events it still participates in. Judy Lum, senior vice president – sales & market-

ing, Tour East Group, said the "blatant year-on-year increase" was not justified. From S\$4,200 (US\$3,247) for an individual table within the Singapore pavilion at AIME last year, Lum said the amount was upped to S\$5,700 this year.

While STB did not answer the *Daily's* query about the jump in participation rates, the bureau's executive director for exhibitions & conferences and conventions & meetings, Jeannie Lim, said that certain criteria was applied

when selecting tradeshow to attend. "Firstly, the level of interest is important. Tradeshow that our partners deem beneficial would naturally also be those that we would be keen to participate in. The profile of the audience is another key consideration, as it determines the quality and quantity of potential leads," she said.

Lim also said that "tradeshow have always been important platforms to market Singapore", and that "promoting a destination ef-

fectively requires collaboration with various tourism stakeholders".

However, Tour East's Lum had a different observation. "STB is now overtly consumer-centric to the detriment of the trade. We do feel abandoned to a certain extent," she said.

Adrian Wong, head of FIT, Pacific World Singapore added: "Travel consultants are left to fend for ourselves. There has been little backing and no joint initiatives. It's all just talk."



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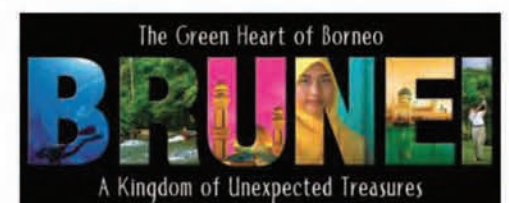
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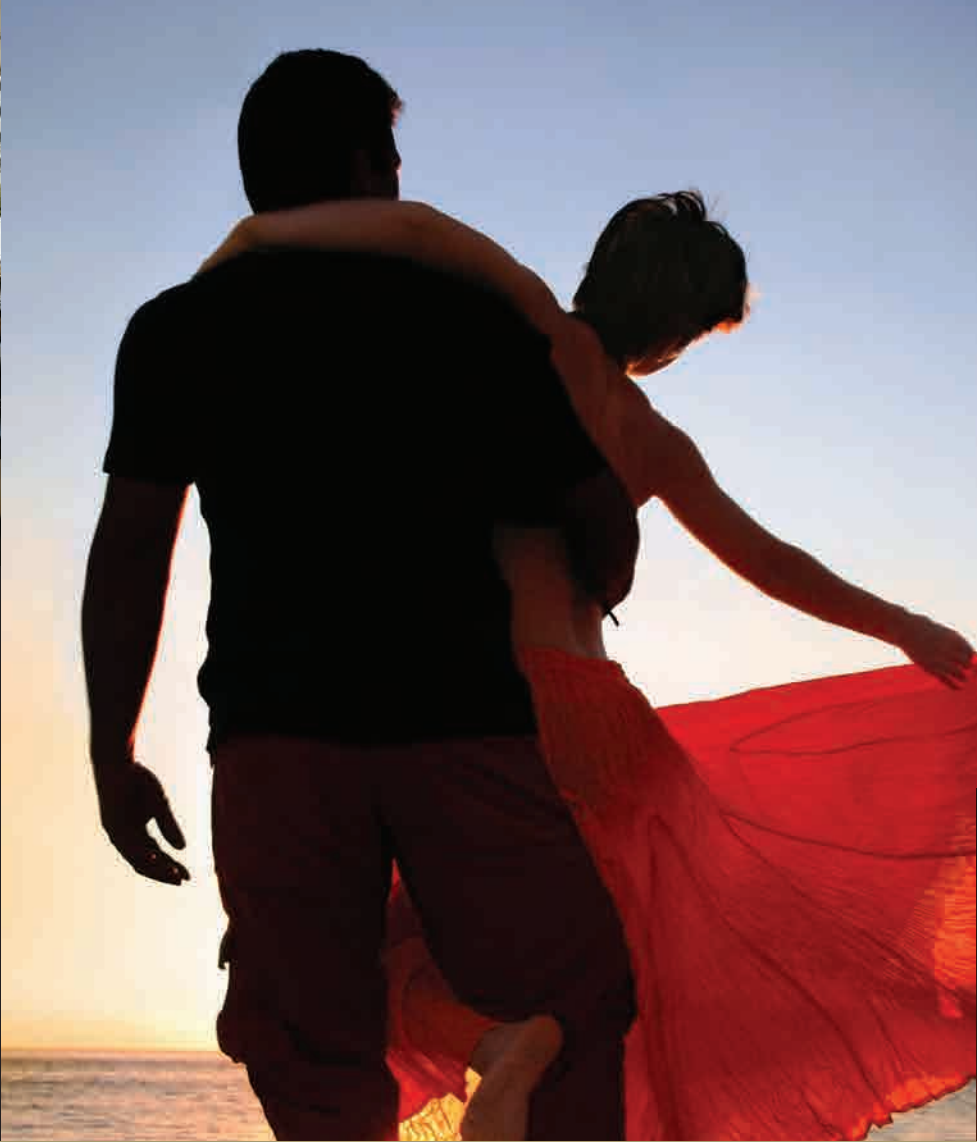
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BEST WESTERN Crown Pacific	Cox's Bazar	Q4 2012
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Coral Beach Hotel	Inani Beach	Q4 2014
BEST WESTERN Bashati Grand Pacific	Cox's Bazar	Q4 2014
<b>Indonesia</b>		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Basko Hotel	Padang Sumatra	Q4 2011
BEST WESTERN Inn Banjamasin	Banjamasin	Q4 2013
BEST WESTERN Hariston	Jakarta	Q4 2013
BEST WESTERN Talegasri Bandung	Bandung	Q4 2014
BEST WESTERN The Sun Heritage	Bali	Q1 2013
BEST WESTERN Mahakam View	Samrinda	Q4 2013
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Candi	Semarang	Q3 2013
BEST WESTERN Star	Semarang	Q4 2013
BEST WESTERN Serpong	Jakarta	Q2 2012
BEST WESTERN Kuta Sea View	Bali	Q4 2011
BEST WESTERN Subaraya	Jalan Ahmad Yani, East Java	Q4 2013
<b>Japan</b>		
BEST WESTERN Japonais Yonezawa	Yonezaw	Q4 2011
<b>Iraq</b>		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Erbil	Erbil	Q4 2013
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Erbil Airport	Erbil	Q4 2014
<b>Kuwait</b>		
BEST WESTERN Mahbola	Kuwait City	Q4 2011
<b>Malaysia</b>		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Dua Sentral	Kuala Lumpur	Q2 2012
BEST WESTERN Subang Alam	Shah Alam	Q4 2013
BEST WESTERN Bangsar	Kuala Lumpur	Q4 2013



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BEST WESTERN PREMIER Malekka	Malacca	Q4 2012
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Heaven	Ipoh	Q4 2013
<b>Oman</b>		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Muscat	Muscat	Q4 2011
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Al-Qurum	Muscat	Q2 2013
<b>Philippines</b>		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER F1 Hotel	Manila	Q4 2011
BEST WESTERN Lex Capitol	Cebu	Q4 2011
BEST WESTERN Oxford Suite	Manila	Q4 2011
<b>Kingdom of Saudi Arabia</b>		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Makkah	Makkah	Q4 2014
BEST WESTERN Makkah	Makkah	Q4 2014
BEST WESTERN Awan Inn	Makkah	Q1 2012
BEST WESTERN Al-Hamra'a Hotel	Riyadh	Q4 2011
BEST WESTERN PLUS Al Ahsa Grand Suites & Studios	Al-Ahsa	Q4 2012
<b>South Korea</b>		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Gunsan	Gunsan	Q4 2013
<b>Thailand</b>		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Sukhumvit	Bangkok	Q4 2012
BEST WESTERN Tuk Chang	Bangkok	Q4 2011
BEST WESTERN Klassique	Bangkok	Q4 2011
BEST WESTERN PLUS Grand Howard	Bangkok	Q1 2012
<b>Vietnam</b>		
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Nha Trang	Nha Trang	Q2 2012
BEST WESTERN PREMIER Indochine Palace	Hue	Q4 2011



# Indonesia looks to region

The trade expects inbound business to continue growing despite the economic problems in both Europe and the US. Reports by **Mimi Hudoyo**



Tirta Empul, Bali

Asia-Pacific and the domestic markets are expected to be strong across Indonesia. The trade, however warns hoteliers to be cautious with rate increases as Australians start to travel beyond Bali. The tourism hotspot may also face more competition from neighbouring countries aiming to woo domestic travellers away from the island.

The Indonesian travel trade expects European visitor numbers to not register a decline this year despite the economic situation. However, only operators with dynamic products and pricing will hold their ground.

Smaller longhaul tour operators are looking to the Far East to boost stagnating numbers from Europe. Panorama Destination CEO, Dharma Tirtawisata, said: "The way I see it, arrivals from Europe will not drop but will stay stagnant. The growth will be from destinations of less than eight hours' flight."

Pacto's business development director, Umberto Cadamuro,

said: "Overall, the outlook for 2012 is still positive in terms of numbers. I don't think the numbers are shrinking.

"We are seeing more and more new players coming in. A lot of new companies are starting to look at business in Asia so I think overall the number will not drop but companies with more dynamic products and those who can update products and rates quickly will win business."

He said that the Euro exchange rate could stabilise at around US\$1.3 to US\$1.4 in 2012. "So, the buying power is good for Europeans going to destinations operating in US dollars like Indonesia."

However, Indonesian inbound operators were confident that the Asia-Pacific market would remain strong.

Cadamuro said: "India is growing stronger for us. Traditionally Germany has been our biggest market, but ... in terms of revenue, between India and Germany, the difference up to September 2011 was only one per cent."

Panorama Destination only entered the Asia market in the last two years but Dharma said it would be the growth area for the company.

"Our Asia market comes from Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and even Sri Lanka. I trust this

regional Asia market will be growing in 2012."

Dharma expected business in 2012 to increase by between 10 per cent and 15 per cent.

"Bali will continue to be the major draw for travellers to Indonesia, but the improved accessibility between cities and the growing number of new hotels in the country, which initially attract domestic businesses, will also attract international travellers," he said.

Commenting on challenges Indonesia would be facing, Cadamuro said: "There is a growing number of Australians going to Thailand now, making Thailand a strong competitor to us."

## My take

"Some tour operators from Europe have asked for shorter Java-Bali packages to make the tours more affordable."

**Adjie Wahjono**

Operations manager, Aneka Kartika Tours and Travel Surabaya

## NTO | Ministry is getting creative

The Indonesia Tourism Authority is now married to the Creative Economy, a new portfolio created by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Cabinet reshuffle last October.

The former Ministry of Culture and Tourism is now the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, while the culture portfolio is now under the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Deputy Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Sapta Nirwandar said: "President Yudhoyono has stressed the importance of tour-

ism and he wants bigger achievements from this sector. The challenges are also getting bigger."

Together with the creative economy, which has the potential to create up to 100 trillion rupiah (US\$11.2 billion) revenue for the country, the ministry is expected to boost the country's economy.

The authority's structure and its strategic plans up to 2014 were in the making at press time but Minister of Tourism and



**Nirwandar: big challenges**

Creative Economy Mari Elka Pangestu said that as well as culture and nature, which have been Indonesia's tourism strengths, the creative industry would play an important role in the development of tourism.

She said: "One of the creative economy development goals is to strengthen the creative image of Indonesian products and services as part of destination branding in the international market."

She explained that the effect of home-grown luxury brand Bagteria, for example, being used by trendsetters such as Paris Hilton, was to promote not only the product but also the destination.

The effect of *La Glacon's* spring collection, designed by a young Indonesian designer, being chosen by Lady Gaga for the US' *Harper's Bazaar* photo session, served to promote the country. She added: "A number of cities have actually used local creative products to promote tourism.

"Pekalongan and Solo in Central

Java are capitals of the batik industry. We can then form a corridor connecting these cities, package them and promote them for tourism."

"Being a venue for filmmaking is also part of nation branding," she said, adding that she expected more movies to be shot in Indonesia, following the international success of *Eat, Pray, Love* and *The Philosophers*.

At press time, the ministry was aiming to reach 7.7 million arrivals up to the end of 2011 and eight million in 2012.



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Indonesia's economy is expected to continue growing this year.

Analysts have projected GDP growth of 6.7 per cent (6.4 per cent in 2011) and inflation is expected to fall from six per cent last year to 5.5 per cent in 2012.

With businesses developing in the regions and accessibility improving, travel within the country is expected to grow. Investors continue to see opportunities to inject their money in accommodation facilities, both in the major destinations and secondary cities.

Swiss-Belhotel International senior vice president operations and development for Indonesia and Malaysia, Emmanuel Guillard, said that Indonesia's economy was very strong, which meant there was demand for properties to be developed and the market would be able to fill rooms.

"We are opening properties up in tertiary destinations like Pangkalan Bun in Central Kalimantan and Kupang in East Nusa Tenggara," he said.

"In fact, our hotels Jayapura, Palu, Samarinda are the ones doing very well, above 80 per cent, while country-wise our average occupancy is 70 per cent."

Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts corporate director of marketing Guido Andriano said: "Mining and agricultural industries (such as palm oil) will still be growing in 2012 onward."

"There is a growing number of middle management and supervisory level of travellers demanding good, clean and safe accommodation in remote areas."

Swiss-Belhotel International now operates 20 hotels with some 3,000 rooms; 27 properties are under development, representing some 5,000 rooms which are due to open by 2013.

The group is aiming to have



Pullman Jakarta

60 hotels in operation within the next three years. In addition, it has introduced a budget brand Zest Hotels in Indonesia, which aims to have 30 properties within three years.

Accor, which operates 43 hotels in Indonesia, has more than 30 new projects in various stages which will add more than 4,500 rooms in the next couple of years.

In Bali, C9 Hotelworks research showed there are between 4,000 and 5,000 luxury condotel units under development or in the planning stage, many of which carry international management companies' brands.

There are also many home-grown brands mushrooming across the country.

Brands such as Whiz Hotels and PHM Hospitality, which belongs to the Panorama Group, are making their way into the marketplace.

Some hotel management companies are even basing themselves in secondary destinations. Kagum Hotels, for example is based in Bandung (West Java), Dafam Hotels & Resorts in Semarang (Central Java) and Grand

Zuri in Riau. These groups tend to grow their properties locally first before reaching out to other parts of Indonesia.

While seeing a possible dip in longhaul markets due to the economic situation, hotel operators are optimistic of their performance this year.

Guido said: "The domestic markets and Asia markets are the backbone of our operation as investment and business in the country continues to grow."

Santika's economy brand Amaris was running an average occupancy rate of 73 per cent across Indonesia while the Santika brand (three- to four-star properties) averaged 83 per cent.

"For Bali alone, the upper-tier brands reached 85 per cent occupancy, despite the entry of new upmarket properties on the island," he said.

There is room to grow both occupancy and rates this year, according to Guido, by five to eight per cent, barely enough to cover inflation, electricity and fuel price hikes.

Swiss-Belhotel is also expecting an increase in rates of five to 10 per cent this year.

**Destination by the numbers**

**93,781** The Philippines ranks 12th in terms of Indonesia's main source markets with 93,781 arrivals between January and September 2011. Between January and July, the number from the Philippines grew by 21.99 per cent compared to the same period in 2010.

**734,021** Malaysia maintained its position as Indonesia's second biggest market in terms of volume in the first nine months of 2011, but the total number of arrivals actually dropped by 4.98 per cent to 734,021 from 772,455 in the same period in 2010. Deputy Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, Sapta Nirwandar, said there were significant monthly surges in the market of between 17 per cent and 38 per cent last year due to the situation in Thailand.

**745,451** Monthly arrivals to Indonesia broke a record high in July 2011 totalling 745,451, according to data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This was 13.2 per cent higher than in July 2010, which saw 658,476 arrivals.

**1.25** A new regulation means that Indonesian commercial airlines must pay 1.25 billion rupiah (US\$139,000) compensation per person if passengers lose their lives in Indonesian airspace.

**237** Indonesia's growing middle class has fostered a boom in domestic travel. The tourism ministry estimated there will be 237 million trips within the country made by more than 122 million tourists in 2011 with an average spend of 650,000 rupiah (US\$73) per person per trip. This year the number is expected to increase to 245 million trips.

**1,500** There are around 1,500 rooms under construction in Lombok due to open by 2012, adding to the current 2,000 star-rated rooms available.

**33.7** The number of domestic airline passengers for January-August totalled 33.7 million, up by 24.12 per cent compared to the same period last year, according to Statistics Indonesia.

**25.6** The Bali immigration office generated US\$25.6 million from visas on arrival from January to June 2011, according to a Bank Indonesia report quoted by Balidiscovery.com.

**15.39** The number of direct airline seats to Indonesia in 2011, according to the Ministry of Transportation, totalled 15,390,128. The biggest numbers are from Malaysia and Singapore (3.9 million each), followed by Australia (1.57 million).

**420** Lampung, the southern most province on Sumatera, which is opening up to tourism, is to have 420 more rooms this year. This will add to the 1,000 star-rated rooms currently available. Among those poised to enter the market are Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts and Swiss-Belhotel International.

**Airline | Expansion is key for Garuda**

Garuda Indonesia, which went public in February 2011, is in expansion mode with increases to fleet, route network and services.

In 2011, the airline received 11 new aircraft comprising two Airbus A330-200 and nine Boeing B737-800NGs, bringing its fleet to a total of 89 aircraft.

Under the 'Quantum Leap' development programme, which will take the carrier up to 2015, Garuda is planning to operate 154 aircraft comprising B737-800NGs for domestic and regional services, A330-300s and 200s for medium haul services, and B777-300ERs for its long-haul flights.

Apart from increasing frequencies on its existing routes, Garuda is developing new hubs in Indonesia that will link both its regional and domestic networks.

It started with Makassar in June 2011, making it the third hub after Jakarta and Bali. This linked Singapore with 13 destinations in eastern Indonesia.

Garuda president and CEO, Emirsyah Satar, said: "Garuda continues to develop its route network in line with the growth of Indonesia's regional economy."

"Makassar, for example, is growing rapidly as a business city and has a strategic position

in east Indonesia. Therefore, we have opened South Sulawesi's capital as a hub for the area."

At press time the airline was planning to open Medan, Balikpapan and Surabaya as hubs in 2012 with a similar strategy, easing access between regional routes and secondary destinations in Indonesia.

Garuda sales & marketing manager Singapore, Clarence Heng, said: "We are planning to open a daily Medan-Singapore service in the first quarter of 2012, as part of the opening of Medan as Garuda's new hub, which serves the surrounding areas in Sumatera."

Commenting on the strategy, Makassar-based Incito Tours managing director Sebastian Ng said: "We have started to get FIT travellers on the Singapore-Makassar route, but it will need time for our business partners overseas to reroute roundtrip packages to start in Makassar instead of Java, for example."

Ng said he hoped that Garuda would not pull out or reduce frequencies should the seat load factor on the Singapore-Makassar route drop below the break-even point "while we are doing our part to help fill seats".

Garuda has also launched its new business plan and refreshed

its low-cost carrier (LCC), Citilink, marking a new era for it.

Garuda's Emirsyah said: "There is a big potential market for LCCs and we would like to revive Citilink, which is already part of the Garuda Indonesia group to capture this market."

The airline, which now contributes five per cent of business to the Garuda group, is aiming to increase this to 30 per cent by 2015. To enable it to do this, the LCC was to get five new A320s by the end of last year. In addition, Citilink has ordered a further 25 A320s, which will be delivered from 2014 onwards with another 25 on option.



Mount Bromo

# Catching them young

Malaysia attracts youth market with learning, volunteering & adventure opportunities

The youth tourism market is a specialised one consisting of young travellers who don't mind roughing it out in exchange for more immersive experiences. They are motivated by the thrill of adventure, travel to exotic locations, and learning new cultures. With its diverse range of tourism attractions, Malaysia is the perfect place for young tourists eager to learn, explore and discover. From its many national parks, such as Kinabalu Park in Sabah, Taman Negara National Park in Pahang, Bako National Park in Sarawak, to white water rafting in Kuala Kubu Baru in Selangor, to diving in the crystal clear waters of Sipadan, there is nothing that the youth traveller would find wanting.

## Learn

Learn the traditions and cultures of Malaysia through a homestay experience ([www.go2homestay.com](http://www.go2homestay.com)). Travellers stay with foster parents in a local village or *kampung*, and experience the traditional Malaysian lifestyle - these include daily practices such as harvesting crops, enjoying home-cooked food, making local crafts, as well as observing traditions such as wedding ceremonies and celebrations.

Currently there are a total of 148 homestays in Malaysia registered with the Ministry of Tourism, with a total of 3,152 homes that offer the programme all over the country. Tourists get a different -and unique- experience at each homestay based on the culture and agricultural practices of the village people as well as the natural environment surrounding it.

## Challenge

Mount Kinabalu is one of the most renowned tourist attractions in Malaysia, and for good reason - standing at 4,095 metres above sea level, it is among the tallest peaks in South East Asia. Located amidst the mountainous Crocker range, this UNESCO World Heritage Site remains a favourite among visitors to Malaysia for the challenge to trek to its summit and admire its astonishing variety of plant and animal wildlife.

A yearly attraction is the International Mount Kinabalu Climbathon (<http://climbathon.sabahtourism.com>), a gruelling 21-kilometre race up and down the mountain. Originally organised to keep park rangers fit and ready to tackle any emergencies, the race has since evolved into a sporting event open to all. The next race is from 20 to 21 October 2012.

Besides the usual summit trail used by trekkers, Mount Kinabalu has a new route to its peak - Mountain Torq's *via ferrata* ([www.mountaintorq.com](http://www.mountaintorq.com)). *Via ferrata*, or iron road in Italian, refers to a mountain path consisting of a series of rungs, rails and cables embracing the rock face. Currently,

Mount Kinabalu is the highest *via ferrata* in the world covering a four to five-hour climb along a route that hugs the mountainside and peaks at 3,776 metres above sea level.

## Volunteer

Volunteer tourism is an exciting opportunity for the curious youth to get a feel of a particular locale and culture and make a difference in the

community. Malaysia offers plenty of such experiences, from working with endangered animals to helping rural communities to preserving natural environments. Typically, volunteer tourists stay with the locals and participate in developmental or conservation programmes from several days to a month.

The Perhentian Turtle Conservation programme ([www.helpourpenyu.com](http://www.helpourpenyu.com))

ropes in volunteers to help protect sea turtles and their nesting beaches on the beautiful Perhentian Island. Meanwhile, at the Sepilok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Center in Sabah ([www.wildlife.sabah.gov.my](http://www.wildlife.sabah.gov.my)) and the Semenggoh Nature Reserve in Sarawak ([www.sarawakforestry.com](http://www.sarawakforestry.com)), volunteers help orphaned orang-utan adapt to a life in the wild.

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# Resort rooms booming

Thailand's hoteliers hope extra air links will take up the slack in already packed market



Phuket

**Thailand**

## Phuket goes direct

Direct air access has allowed Phuket to remain largely unaffected by Bangkok's problems – such as May 2010's political crisis and the recent flooding.

Destination Asia CEO and managing director, James Reed, said the flooding in Bangkok had not hit Phuket bookings for the 2011-2012 high season.

Dusit International assistant vice-president sales, Simon Burgess, added: "A number of operators at World Travel Market 2011 said they had increased forward bookings for 2012."

Phuket is seeing robust demand and hotel development is booming, however, the island's airport is stretched beyond its capacity of 6.5 million passengers a year.

Airports of Thailand (AoT) expected 7.95 million passengers would have passed through the airport in 2011 and that figure to rise even further for 2012. AoT executive vice-president for business development and marketing, Sirote Duangratana, said work to raise capacity to handle 12.5 million passengers a year by 2014 had begun.

But in the meantime, congestion in the terminals was especially troublesome during winter when the island welcomes charters from Scandinavia, Europe, Russia and China. It is also handling a growing number of flights from Europe, Asia and Australia, and accounts for 80 per cent all flights from Australia to Thailand.

The bullish outlook has prompted investors to add hotel and tourism-related facilities. A CB Richard Ellis Research Services Thailand report said that the number of mid-range to luxury hotel rooms in Phuket increased by 10 per cent year-on-year to 12,118 rooms in the second quarter of 2011. By 2014, the island will add 29 hotels with 5,900 rooms.

Among this year's openings are the 246-room Holiday Inn Resort Phuket Mai Khao Beach and the 123-room B-Lay Tong Phuket, an Accor's MGallery Collection. In the pipeline for the next few years are a COMO resort, a Pullman hotel, and InterContinental Hotels Group's Hotel Indigo and Holiday Inn Express. – **Sirima Eamtako**



**Thailand**

## Koh Samui hotels up

Koh Samui is expected to see arrivals rise as airlines add air links but the number of hotels in the pipeline mean it will still face an oversupply of rooms.

Bangkok Airways plans to launch a daily Samui-Kuala Lumpur service in March and increase Samui-Hong Kong from one to two flights daily. The services will complement its existing 30 flights daily from domestic and regional destinations.

SilkAir, which launched a thrice-weekly Singapore-Samui service on September 27, planned to make it to five flights per week by year-end 2011.

SilkAir CEO, Marvin Tan, said new route had strong forward bookings with customers from Singapore and Australia – the latter via Singapore Airlines' network.

Nora Resorts and Hotels business development and marketing vice-president Vorasit Pongkumpunt said improved air links would help Koh Samui especially as supply continued to outstrip demand.

Koh Samui has about 17,000 rooms, including more than 4,000 in the four and five-star categories. Hotels on the island were expected to run at an average occupancy rate of around 60 per cent for 2011, a slight improvement over 2010, said Bannasat Ruangjan, president of the Tourism Association of Koh Samui.

Bannasat said Koh Samui continued to be a high-end destination where five-star hotels were running at an average room rate of 7,000 baht (US\$225) to 8,000 baht and top-end properties are said to fetch more than 10,000 baht.

But Oriental Events CEO and managing director, Worapot Srabua, said he expected room rates to become more competitive. Anantara Bophut Koh Samui general manager, Manish Jha, said competition had become fierce due to the opening of branded hotels.

In 2010, the island welcomed W Retreat Koh Samui and Banyan Tree Koh Samui. In 2011, it added Conrad, Le Meridien and InterContinental resorts. In 2012, a Movenpick and a Starwood's Luxury Collection resorts are slated to open. – **Sirima Eamtako**

**Thailand**

## Hua Hin saturated

Hua Hin's four- and five-star hotel market, which is already saturated with local and international brands, is set for more competition with the opening of a Golden Tulip hotel and an Amari resort in late 2011 and early 2012, respectively.

Golden Tulip South-east Asia managing director, Mark van Ogtrop, said the 100-room Golden Tulip Samudra Hua Hin would be in the four-star category. Located 11km north of Hua Hin town centre, the hotel is part of the Samudra Hua Hin integrated resort. Phase one will involve the Golden Tulip Samudra Hua Hin, followed by the 118-room Radisson Blu Resort Hua Hin and the 11-key Samudra Villas.

On Takiab Beach, about four kilometres south of the town centre, the 1.2 billion baht (US\$38.7 million) Amari Hua Hin is slated to open in March as part of a mixed-use development that also comprises the 210-unit Amari Residences.

The resort, in the four-and-a-half-star category, would target leisure, corporate and conference business from local and international markets, especially Europe, the UK, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and India.

This means the hotel will be in the same price range as Hua Hin Marriott Resort and Spa, and joins a segment saturated with strong brands such as Hilton, Sheraton, InterContinental, Anantara and Dusit Thani, as well as Centara Grand Beach Resort & Villas Hua Hin which rebranded from a Sofitel from January 1, 2012.

Andreas Pfister, general manager of the two-year-old InterContinental Resort Hua Hin, said demand from meeting and events business had prompted the resort's owner Suwat Liptapanlop to invest in a second InterContinental branded property with a large conference facility, due to open within two years.

Anantara Hua Hin general manager, Naowarat Arunkong, said she expected slight increases from 2011 as Hua Hin is getting better-known internationally with events such as Elephant Polo. Naowarat also expected the Indian and Chinese markets to continue to grow year by year. – **Sirima Eamtako**



**Thailand**

**Pattaya is investing**

Pattaya's evolving image as a destination for families and events, rather than the haunt of single male travellers, is being strengthened as the city adds new infrastructure.

Hotel developers and management companies are also making a beeline for the resort despite the destination's current oversupply.

The 2010 opening of the 6.5 billion baht (US\$208 million) Bangkok-Chon Buri-Pattaya motorway (Highway 7) has shortened and improved travel between Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport and the resort city, while the expansion of the Royal Thai Navy's U-Tapao Pattaya International Airport is expected to attract regular direct international flights.

The Royal Thai Navy broke ground on the airport's new passenger terminal in July 2011 with work slated to take 15 months. Once opened, the new building will bring the airport's capacity up to 1,500 passengers per hour from the current 400.

Pattaya is also working on plans for two mega infrastructure developments – a 6.5km monorail around the resort city and a new marina.

The hotel market has also been busy. Last year, Centara Hotels and Resorts opened two new properties in Pattaya, bringing its total in the destination to three, in three different segments. The four-star, 79-room Nova Hotel and Spa Pattaya is part of the group's Centara Boutique Collection while the 152-room Centra Pattaya Resort is part of its mid-range brand.

Suthikiati Chirathivat, chairman of the executive board of Central Plaza Hotel, said that the overwhelming success of the five-star Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort



Pattaya since its grand opening in 2009 had revealed the potential of Pattaya. "Pattaya has tremendous tourism growth potential for us," he said.

The chain was also opening two further properties this year – a five-star Centara Grand Resort and Spa Pattaya and a four-star Naklua Hotel and Spa Pattaya, Centara Boutique Collection.

Pattaya's huge tourism potential has also been noted by Siam Hotels and Resorts executive vice president, Marisa Sukosol-Nunbhakdi. She said the group's two properties – Siam Bayview and Siam Bayshore – were seeing growing numbers of Russian, Chinese and Indian guests on top of its traditional markets from Europe and Japan.

The group's renovated Siam Bayview will be rebranded The Bayview in July. The 90-million-baht investment had already seen the completion of the View meetings room

and eight suites in 2011, and will involve the overhaul of the lobby and some deluxe rooms between April and June 2012. A further 50 million baht will be spent on the refurbishment of the Siam Bayshore.

Sukosol-Nunbhakdi said that in a bid to capture the trendier end of the market, the group would develop a 400-million baht, 21-room, Miami-art-deco-inspired Wave property. The chic boutique hotel would open on the oceanfront in Pattaya.

The latest Ministry of Tourism and Sports figures showed Pattaya recorded 8.3 million visitors in 2010, up 93.07 per cent over 2009. Of the total, some 5.35 million were foreign visitors. Visitors spent an average 3.17 days, down from 3.38 days in 2009, and contributed a total revenue of 73 million baht, up 65 per cent year-on-year.

Of the city's total 49,348 rooms in 2010 (up 28 per cent over 2009), hotels were running at an average occupancy of 46.30 per cent compared to 33.23 per cent in 2009. – **Sirima Eamtako**

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## Philippines

### Boracay expands

Boracay is gearing up for increasing arrival numbers in the wake of massive expansion plans that include casinos and thousands of new hotel rooms.

Renovations have also been made to the airport terminal on neighbouring Caticlan Island, where the departure area has been revamped. Runway lights are also being added, which will increase the number of daily flights that can fly into Boracay.

A three-year plan includes further improvements so that larger aircraft will be able to land in Caticlan instead of Kalibo, saving travellers between 90 minutes and two hours of travel time. This improves the destination's chance of increasing arrival numbers from South Korea, Taiwan and mainland China, Boracay's largest source markets.

Low-cost carrier Zest Air has added a Friday flight with 160 seats to its existing Shanghai-Kalibo route, while on the domestic front Airphil Express added capacity with two new weekly flights with 160 seats each.

Seasonal charter flights from Taiwan and China during Chinese New Year were provided by Philippine Airlines, flying Taipei-Kalibo six times per week, and China Airlines, which flies four times a week with 160 seats per flight, adding two flights.

Boracay's resort expansion in 2012 includes new rooms from Hotel District (70 rooms), Nandana Boracay (92, opening early this year) and Crowne Regency (200), which is also adding meetings space.

Megaworld Properties, sister company of Resorts-World Manila developer Alliance Global, is at work on a US\$345 million integrated resort project called Boracay Newcastle.



Sailing in a paraw in Boracay

It is being built on what was formerly known as Fairways & Bluewater. Although the property currently has 79 rooms, the plan includes a Richmonde Hotel, a Courtyard by Marriott, a Hilton and a Maxims

Hotel, as well as other international brands, totalling an estimated 2,500 rooms. Crowne Regency and Boracay Newcastle have also acquired casino licences.

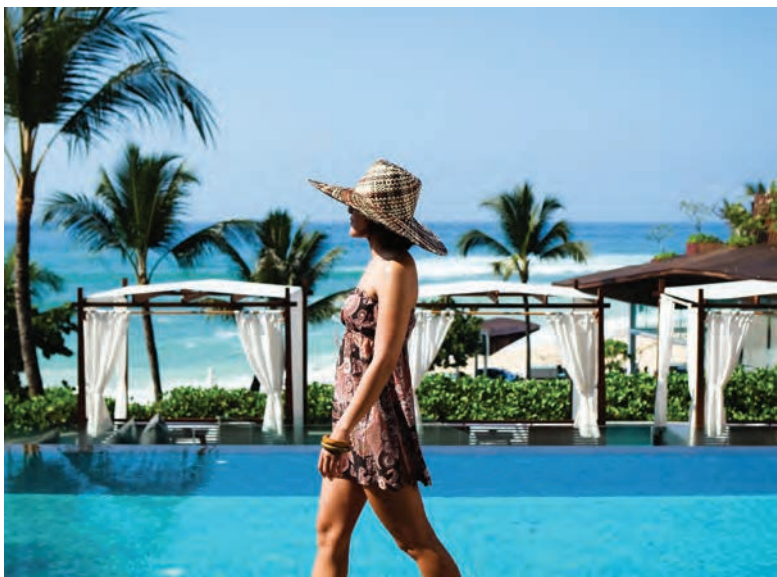
Premier rates tend to dominate throughout the year, except during typhoon season. Leeds Trompeta, director of sales at Discovery Shores Boracay, said: "We've had about 60-68 per cent occupancy, even during the lean period of June to October."

Rates range from US\$300-US\$600, but Trompeta does not expect them to rise by more than five per cent this

year, which answers differences from inflation and US dollar fluctuations.

Armi Pareja, reservations manager at the 28-room resort of 7Stones Boracay on Bulabog Beach, said the average room rate was 6,000 pesos (US\$140), which was also expected to rise by five per cent in 2012.

Leisure activities such as kitesurfing, kiteboarding and dragon boating on Bulabog Beach have raised Boracay's profile as a sports tourism destination in the last 10 years. However, concerns remain about resorts flouting environmental regulations, especially water management. There are also worries about the long-term effects of development on the island, where there are plans for land reclamation to expand the port. Flooding hit Boracay in 2011 – a new phenomenon for the resort. – Marianne Carandang



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Kuala Lumpur Hop-On-Hop-Off bus; Mosque Soas, Brunei

**Singapore** Recent disasters put a damper on demand

Data compiled by Statistics Singapore shows that 7.3 million Singapore residents ventured abroad in 2010, a rise of 5.5 per cent over the previous year. The figure has grown every year since 2005, proving Singaporeans have an ever-increasing appetite for foreign travel. About 76.5 per cent of those who headed overseas in 2010 flew, with the remainder choosing to sail.

However, the figures do not include departures via the two causeways to Malaysia. Consequently, the number of Singaporeans heading overseas is much higher than reported.

Official statistics show a mixed picture, a fact reiterated by Singapore outbound operators.

Tourism Malaysia reported 13 million arrivals from Singapore in 2010, reflecting the propensity for multiple trips to Malaysia. From 2006 to 2010, the number of Singaporeans travelling to Malaysia grew 34.9 per cent.

Numbers heading to Indonesia were much smaller – hitting 1.4 million in 2010, as outlined by the country’s statistical authority. Numbers to Indonesia have declined marginally (two per cent) since 2006.

Just 603,538 Singaporeans made their way to Thailand in 2010, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand. The volume of visitors from Singapore dropped by 12.2 per cent over the 2006-10 period.

The number to the Philippines is even lower – in 2010, 121,803 Singapore residents made their way to the country – a 23.9 per cent rise on the previous year.

Jane Chang, marketing & communications manager Chan Brothers Travel, told the *Daily* that her company experienced an 11 per cent rise in bookings from Singapore to ASEAN countries in 2010 over 2009. In the first 10 months of 2011, bookings remained on par with 2010.

“We expect to close with a 20 per cent growth in 2011,” said Chang. She added that Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam showed the most visible growth.

Stella Chow, manager-advertising and marketing division, outbound tour department, Hong Thai Travel Services, said Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam were its biggest sellers.

Chang said it was difficult to convince Singaporeans to travel beyond tried-and-tested destinations such as Hua Hin in

Thailand, Sabah in Malaysia and Yogyakarta in Indonesia. The natural disasters that have beset the region have also put a damper on demand.

However, Roshan Mendis, president of Zuji, and regional vice president of Travelocity Asia Pacific, told the *Daily* that Singaporeans booking online were a more adventurous lot. “With the rise of low-cost carriers and their popular shorthaul routes, we see that ASEAN travel will continue to grow. This is seen especially in ‘off-the-beaten-track’ destinations such as Bandung, Krabi, Luang Prabang, Yangon and Ujung Pandang,” he said.

Chow said ASEAN countries should work on their “flight accessibility, infrastructure and to tweak their marketing campaigns to include little gestures such as shopping vouchers”.

Mendis suggested a different approach: “Although Singaporean travellers tend to travel to nearby regions on low fares, they desire four- to five-star hotels – a basic ‘creature comfort’ for city dwellers. Singaporean travellers are a savvy lot; food reviews and shopping bargain hunts are mainly what attracts (Singaporean) travellers.” – **Linda Haden**



Australia, South Korea and

Taiwan are more aggressive than ASEAN in marketing their countries to Singaporeans. More effort needs to be put in on their part if they are to compete on an even-playing field.

**Alicia Seah**, senior vice president, marketing & PR, CTC Travel



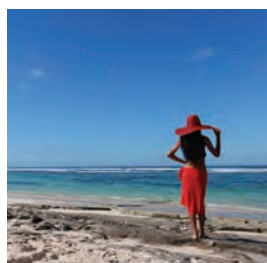
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# Malaysia is only looking up

China, India and ASEAN are the top targets as Malaysia continues its march upmarket by focusing efforts on attracting big spenders. Reports by **N. Nithiyanthan**



Langkawi, view from Mt Machinchang

Courtesy of Tourism Malaysia

2011 was a successful year for Malaysia with increasing numbers of visitors from China, India and ASEAN countries. Hoteliers are rebranding and upgrading as they expect increases in both occupancy and room rates, while the big players in the skies, Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia, have carved out their respective turfs. The trade is also keen to support Tourism Malaysia's move to bring in higher-spending visitors.

Overall, 2011 was a good year for Malaysia's inbound market, said Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association president, Albert S. S. Tan.

"The country maintained its number of arrivals and experienced growth from a number of countries including China and India, and ASEAN."

He added: "Tourism Malaysia has done a lot of promotions which have had a positive effect."

Speaking as managing director of Tongyan Travel & Tours – which has China and Hong Kong as its main source markets – Tan said the company had been able to maintain 2010's figures, while noting that this was achieved in a

more competitive environment.

Asia Experience head of sales, Clement Ho, said his company expected to fare about the same as, if not slightly better than in 2010.

"The European and US financial crises and the disaster in Japan made travel volatile," he said, adding that the Middle East, Europe and Asia-Pacific served as the main source markets for Asia Experience.

With reference to this year, Tan said everyone was cautious. "There are still unfavourable factors like the economy in the US and Europe," he said.

"Hopefully there will not be any financial crises in 2012. It is important to track the Asian

markets as they are strong and stable," he added.

This strategy was supported by AOS Conventions & Events. Its managing director, Amos Wong, said: "Based on the current economic situation, focus for 2012 will be on the Asia-Pacific region, where their economies have been consistently achieving above six per cent growth."

"A downward fall in numbers from the US and Europe in 2011 had put downward pressure on our fee revenue," he added.

For Asia Experience, even though it was still too early to forecast for this year, there was already one dark cloud on the horizon.

"Our main market is the Mid-

dle East. As the fasting month of Ramadan falls within their summer holidays this year, and they like to stay at home during this period, we anticipate a fall in numbers from this market," Ho said.

With reference to increasing arrivals from ASEAN, Tan said there was a need for more direct flights into regional destinations such as Penang, Johor Bahru, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu.

"If Malaysia is able to increase the number of direct flights to these destinations from ASEAN, without the need for travellers to come through the hub of Kuala Lumpur, it will save time and money and drive more people into Malaysia," he said.

## My take

"People enjoy the shopping and culture in Malaysia. Making them decide to come here is a matter of the right pricing, a conducive economic climate and regional stability."

**Clement Ho**  
Head of sales  
Asia Experience

## NTO | Focus is on high-spending tourists

Tourism Malaysia's marketing plans for 2012 will support the government's tourism transformation programme and its desire to move Malaysia towards a high-income nation status by 2020.

"We will leverage on the established 'Malaysia Truly Asia' branding to maintain growth in total tourist arrivals and expand market share in certain niche segments," said Tourism Malaysia acting director general, Azizan Noordin.

"Efforts will be focused on

targeting and attracting high-spending tourists."

As a result, tourist receipts are expected to expand at a higher rate than tourist arrivals.

As of June 2011, Tourism Malaysia reported more than 11.4 million tourist arrivals, against a total of 24.6 million arrivals in 2010.

"We aim to receive 26.3 million tourists in 2012," Azizan said.



**Azizan: looking for big spenders**

The targets this year, Azizan said, were "the ASEAN countries; China and India, having large 'middle-class' consumers; Middle East countries; and emerging markets such as Russia and New Zealand".

New products that have the potential to bring in greater numbers of tourists to Malaysia and encourage visitors to stay longer, will continue

to be promoted this year, including the 1Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourism Festival, Malaysia International Shoe Festival and Fabulous Food 1Malaysia.

"Other attractions are the 1Malaysia Helicopter Tours as well as parks and gardens, since the country is blessed with multifarious beautiful and exotic flora and fauna," said Azizan.

Tourism Malaysia will promote Malaysia overseas as a preferred leisure and business destination

through various marketing activities. "The global advertising campaigns will be stepped up in 2012 with new creatives," Azizan said.

"More targeted participants – overseas tour operators and media – will be invited for the mega familiarisation programme."

The main lesson learned from 2011, he said, was the need to be flexible in designing and implementing marketing programmes to respond quickly to the market situation and changing trends.





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**Hotels | Upgrades pave way for rises**

Both resorts and city hotels projected an increase in occupancy and room rates this year.

Rebrandings and refurbishments have also provided a platform for this to happen.

Resorts World Genting (RWG), which registered 95 per cent occupancy in 2011 for the 10,000 rooms at the Genting Highlands resort, refurbished and rebranded the Genting Hotel as Maxim's Genting last October to target the luxury market.

Vice president - marketing, Chow Wei Heng, said: "We believe the demand for such higher-end products is very high, especially from both the China and India markets and we definitely want to be part of the lucrative business."

As a result, rates increased by about 80 per cent to a minimum RM500 (US\$160) a night.

For Swiss-Garden International Hotels, Resorts & Inns, the average occupancy rate for its Swiss-Garden Hotel Kuala Lumpur was more than 80 per cent. "It was an increase of eight per cent compared to the same period in 2010," said Rayan Komatt, group general manager for the central region.

The group's resort properties in Kuantan and Pangkor experienced a rate increase of five and



Maxim's Genting

10 per cent respectively in 2011 compared to the previous year.

Komatt expects an increase of approximately seven to nine per cent for occupancy and average daily rates this year.

He added: "There will be a significant increase in the business and corporate market for the Swiss-Garden Residences as compared to 2011, especially for mid- and long-term segment, as there is an escalating demand for serviced apartments."

Ritz-Carlton Kuala Lumpur general manager, Steve Cokkinias, said: "Both occupancy and rates are up slightly in the saturated Kuala Lumpur market."

For 2012, he said: "We expect the group sector to return to its

2007-2008 form. Kuala Lumpur has always been an attractive destination for groups and events."

Philip Schaez, senior vice president of sales & marketing for Kosmopolito Hotels International, which owns and manages three Dorsett Regency and one Silka properties in Malaysia, said: "We expect an increase in occupancy and rates for 2012. We also expect to open new hotels."

RWG will continue to focus on Singapore, China, India, the Middle East (during the northern summer) and neighbouring countries as priorities this year.

"Our priority markets will be China and India, the Middle East and Europe," Swiss-Garden's Komatt concurred.

**Destination by the numbers**

**10** Accor is slated to open 10 new hotels in Malaysia by 2014, in addition to its current four properties.

**36** Malaysia's target for tourism arrivals by 2020 is 36 million with a projected RM168 billion (US\$56 billion) in revenue.

**44** Tourism Malaysia now operates 44 overseas offices.

**78** The second block of the Lost World Hotel which opened for business in December has 78 rooms.

**87** The total five-star hotel inventory in Malaysia is 87 properties, which tend to be overbooked during peak travel seasons.

**95** The year-long occupancy rate for the 10,000 hotel rooms at the Genting Highlands resort is 95 per cent.

**422** The refurbished and rebranded Maxim's Genting Hotel in the Genting Highlands Resort has 422 rooms.

**513** The Pullman Kuala Lumpur Bangsar, which is scheduled to open in the second quarter of 2012, will have a total room inventory of 513 rooms.



**Airline | The big boys are collaborating**

The biggest and most unanticipated development in the airline sector in Malaysia in 2011 was the comprehensive collaboration framework (CCF) for Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and AirAsia signed on August 9.

By entering into the CCF, the airlines' respective business turfs were clearly defined.

MAS would now focus on the premium segment. Its subsidiary, Firefly, would become a full-service carrier serving regional destinations, while continuing with its turboprop operations to domestic and neighbouring destinations. AirAsia and AirAsia X

would continue with their low-cost services to short-, medium- and longhaul destinations.

Both airlines also agreed to complement each other's businesses, so as to leverage on their core strengths and increase efficiency. While this process involved an assessment of their respective network services, AirAsia CEO, Tony Fernandes, said: "There will be no rationalisation where routes or purchase of aircraft is concerned."

As it was all "about growth", Fernandes added that all four airlines would continue to compete on or for similar routes, or

carve out new destinations for different target markets.

The CCF was facilitated by a share swap deal between Tune Air, which owns shares in AirAsia, and Khazanah Nasional, the government's investment arm, which owns a 69 per cent stake in MAS.

Tune Air received 20.5 per cent equity in MAS, while Khazanah received 10 per cent equity in AirAsia.

As a result, Fernandes and Kamarudin Meranun of AirAsia gained places on the MAS board, while MAS director Mohamed Azman Yahya joined the AirAsia

board. In the process, the then MAS managing director, Tengku Azmil Zahrudin, and seven other directors resigned, while Ahmad Jauhari Yahya took up his appointment as MAS' new managing director in September. Since the deal was signed and the new MD appointed, two significant developments had taken place.

One was Firefly closing down its Johor Bahru hub which provided direct flights to Kuching and Kota Kinabalu in East Malaysia, and to Bandung and Surabaya in Java.

The other was MAS taking

over Firefly's jet-engine operations from Kuala Lumpur to Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and Labuan, because of heavy losses.

New plans for MAS include the launch of a regional premium airline, in the third quarter of 2012, using a fleet of B737-800s and B737-400s with seats configured in two classes. Yet to be named, it will be managed by Firefly.

AirAsia will continue with its business-as-usual expansion plans. These include flying to both major (and secondary) airports, even in countries which are already served by MAS.

Courtesy of Tourism Malaysia

Masjid Sultan Abu Bakar, Johor



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**Malaysia**

**Note of caution sounded but outlook is good**

Malaysians continue to have a passion for travel, say leading travel operators specialising in outbound travel.

For Holiday Tours & Travel, the outbound market for 2011, as of October, was very positive. The company has seen a business increase of approximately 16 per cent compared to the same period in 2010.

“The growth is due in part to the strengthening of our currency against USD, Euro & GBP,” said its vice president-outbound, Jamie How. “As some of our tours are pegged against the USD, this translates to even better value.”

Apple Vacations & Conventions posted a 15 per cent increase in outbound travel in 2011 compared to the same period in 2010, with most of its customers headed to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China. Managing director, Koh Yock Seng, said: “Malaysians are still travelling and the outbound market is growing with greater choices.”

Koh said one of the contributory factors for the growing demand was the presence of low-cost carriers. “AirAsia is very strong and we also have Jetstar and Tiger Airways. These airlines have contributed to regionally

focused travel to countries such as Macau, Hong Kong, Thailand and Indonesia.”

For Holiday Tours, Central Europe was among its more popular destinations. A good number of Apple Vacations’ customers were also starting to head to Europe.

However, World Discovery Travel (M) business development manager, Joseph Xavier, said ASEAN was the most popular travel destination for Malaysians. “You can hop on a plane and travel for three days for a reasonable air fare,” he said.

“The always-popular destinations are Bangkok, Bali and Jakarta. Myanmar is also increasing in popularity mainly because it is an unchartered territory.”

For Apple Vacations, Thailand (incorporating Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket), Bali and Singapore were the top destinations in ASEAN.

“The movement to the Philippines is very small,” Koh said.

ASEAN countries had a share of 30 to 35 per cent of Holiday Tours’ outbound market. Thailand (Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai), Indonesia (Bali), Vietnam and Cambodia were top sellers.

“To attract more visitors, ASEAN countries need to pro-

mote new experiences ... to encourage repeat visits,” said How. “They also need to promote new destinations as a possible add-on to existing popular destinations.”

Koh said: “While there is a sense of caution about spending because of the economic and political situations in Malaysia and globally, 2012 is looking good. The economic situation in Malaysia is not that bad and people can still afford to travel.”

He added: “There has been a shift from series to FIT-style travel. AirAsia has been instrumental in educating young people on independent travel.”

Holiday Tours believes the market could be soft this year because of the global economic situation but, “consumers will still continue to travel but might change their travel pattern to shorthaul/midhaul destinations”, How said.

“For longhaul destinations, we could possibly be looking at shorter stays,” she added.

There was one bright spot in light of a potential economic slowdown. “It could also mean greater deals/savings as hotels, principals, suppliers look at promotional offers to stir the market,” How explained. – N. Nithiyananthan



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**Jamie How**  
Vice president, outbound  
Holiday Tours & Travel



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# Laos all set for big events

**Host of ATF 2013 has more than just ATF on its mind, Raini Hamdi rounds up**

**My take**

“Laos will certainly serve as another choice destination for many Singaporean travellers, offering a different kind of experience.”

**BL Khoo**  
Managing director  
Universal Travel Corp, Singapore

Laos is turning on its full charm this year, this being Visit Laos Year and the year it hosts the Asia-Europe Meeting. By the time it welcomes ATF delegates next year, buyers and sellers are likely to see infrastructure improvements – air access, road access, hotels, attractions, etc – that are already in full swing in light of these events.

One of the most significant developments is Lao Airlines’ launch of services to Singapore (see Airline next page), a gateway from which it can funnel visitors. Until now, Bangkok was the primary gateway for international travellers to Laos, but an aviation analyst noted a bottleneck there with Thai visitors to Laos growing 19 per cent in 2010 and another 19 per cent in the first eight months of 2011.

“This is perhaps why Lao Airlines has cleverly timed its flight from Singapore to coincide with flights that arrive earlier from Europe and Australia/New Zealand,” he observed.

Singapore travel companies such as Universal Travel Corp wasted no time in launching



Raini Hamdi

Expect infrastructure improvements as Laos gears up to host the Asia-Europe Meeting and Visit Laos Year this year, and ATF next year.

promotions following the new services to Singapore. Managing director BL Khoo said: “Within one and a half months, we have more than 200 bookings and it is still growing strong. These numbers are encouraging.”

The first seven months of 2011 already saw a 23 per cent increase in arrivals to Laos to more than 1.49 million, with Thailand, Vietnam and China as the top three markets. Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA) expects to end 2011 with a six per cent increase to 2.67 million and is

eyeing a target of 7.7 per cent growth in arrivals this year to 2.87 million.

Tourism, along with agriculture and the environment, is an important component of the Laos Pilot Programme (LPP) “to narrow the development gap towards ASEAN integration”, a tripartite undertaking by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), ASEAN Secretariat and the Laos government.

An LPP Tourism Promotion Component was officially launched in February 2011. One

of its first tasks is to support the Tourism Marketing and Promotion Sub-Committee for Visit Laos Year 2012, which comprises representatives from the public and private sectors.

Another is to organise exchange programmes to tap the experience and know-how of other ASEAN member states in tourism promotion and development. One such training was held from October 31 to November 4 in Singapore, where 20 trainees selected from each Lao province and the LNTA learnt how to create effective tourism brochures, website and video clips.

The LPP Tourism Promotion Component has also been assigned to summarise recommended measures for tourism marketing and promotion which will be integrated into the Tourism Development Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2020.

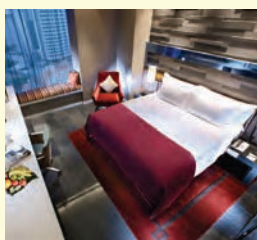
Meanwhile, the first joint tourism promotion among the three Indochina countries, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, was held in Paris last September/October.

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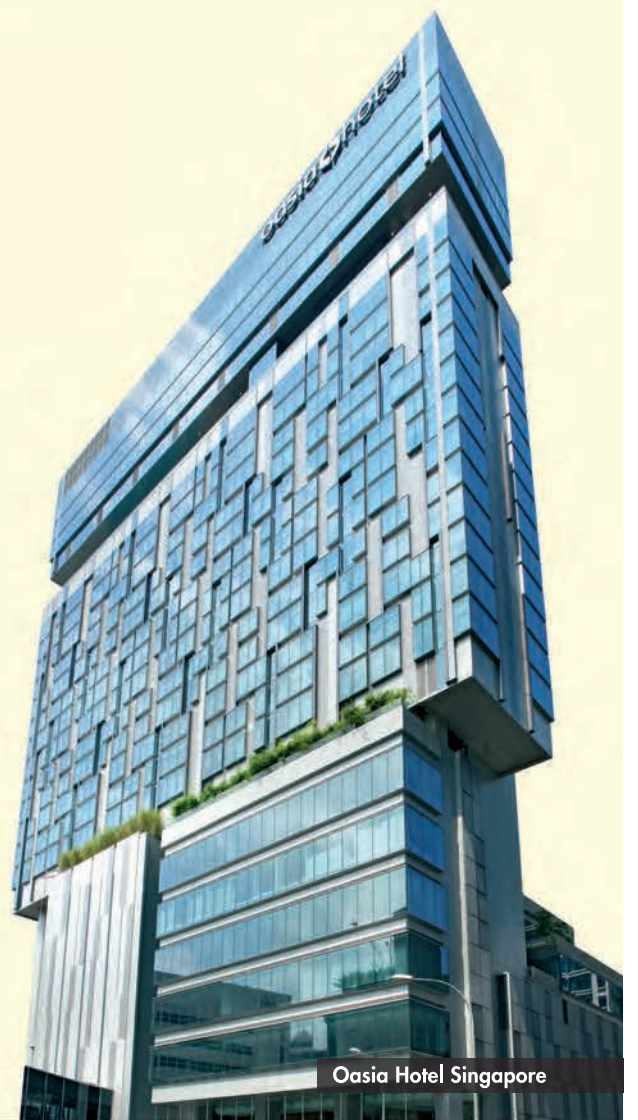
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**Airline | Lao Airlines doubles capacity**

The national carrier of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has doubled its capacity with the delivery of two new Airbus A320s. Prior to this, Lao Airlines' fleet consisted of eight turbo-prop aircraft – four ATR72-500s and four MA-60s.

The two A320s have been deployed on the flights to Singapore, which started on November 24 last year, and will potentially be deployed to Guangzhou and Seoul. It will also be deployed on existing services to Bangkok, Kunming, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City as well as on domestic services linking Vientiane to Luang Prabang and Pakse.

Each A320 is configured with 16 business class and 126 economy class seats.

Lao Airlines' thrice-weekly flights linking Vientiane and Singapore have created another gateway, with the flight timings offering excellent connections for visitors from Europe, Australia, South Asia and the rest of South-east Asia.

QV535 departs Vientiane at 15:05 and arrives in Singapore at 18:30, while QV545 departs Singapore 19:40 and arrives in Vientiane at 21:05.

The flight time is about two and a half hours.

Prior to this, travellers from Singapore to Laos had to take a connecting flight from Bangkok.

Lao Airlines' president Dr. Somphone Douantdara said: "Lao Airlines is on the threshold



Lao Airlines' A320

of a new and exciting growth trajectory, one that is in tune with the upswing in tourism to Laos. The introduction of new Airbus A320s into our fleet and the opening of a non-stop service to Singapore greatly expands our capacity to tap into the potential feed through our gateways in Bangkok and Singapore."

Lao Airlines intends to focus on building brand-awareness for the airline and at the same time co-operate with the Lao National Tourism Administration and the Laotian tourism industry to promote travel to Laos.

BL Khoo, managing director

of Universal Travel Corp Singapore, said: "(Previously) Laos was the only ASEAN country which did not have a direct link to Singapore. Tourists had to fly via either Thailand or Vietnam to enter Laos.

"This inconvenience resulted in a minimal number of Singapore tourists travelling to Laos as compared to other Asian countries. Although Laos is well known for its stunning nature, rich cultures, traditions and peaceful lifestyle, it is like a hidden treasure yet to be discovered by many."

Maple Aviation is Lao Airlines' GSA in Singapore.

Besides Singapore, Lao Airlines' international network offers links from Vientiane to Kunming and Jinghong in China, Bangkok and Chiang Mai in Thailand, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, and Phnom Penh and Siem Reap in Cambodia. Direct links connect Luang Prabang to Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

The deployment of Airbus A320s on flights to and from Luang Prabang is facilitated by the runway extension at Luang Prabang Airport, whose US\$86.4 million upgrade, including the runway, is well in progress.



Maison Souvannaphoum

**Hotels | Luang Prabang**

Demand for travel to Luang Prabang – designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995 for its well-preserved historic architecture and fusion of Lao culture with French colonial style in the 19th and 20th centuries – is expected to grow strongly as a result of its airport upgrade (see Airline) and an increase in the number of rooms.

The existing supply of 1,078 rooms from 44 hotels in Luang Prabang is expected to grow by 16 per cent this year, including from two Anantara properties. The other two boutique international brands, Amanresorts and an Alila hotel, along with Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts, which manages the Maison Souvannaphoum in Luang Prabang, have

already helped raise awareness of the laid-back town through their presence and marketing.

Maison Souvannaphoum has just completed a refurbishment of the resort's rooms, gardens, spa and public areas.

Last year saw the opening of an 18-hole golf course by a South Korean joint venture company, which includes provisions for a 250-room hotel and 100 upscale villas.

More properties also opened, with their number of rooms ranging from seven to 54. They include Kiridara Luang Prabang, Xieng Thong Palace, Hotel de La Paix Luang Prabang, Villa Nagara, Luang Say Residence, Le Palais Juliana and Shinta Mani Luang Prabang.



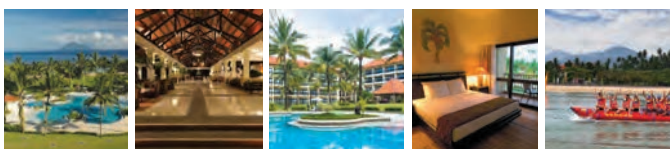
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# Vietnam continues to soar

A glowing tourism report for 2011 whets the appetite for more growth. Reports by **Sirima Eamtako**

## My take

“Vietnam’s tourism industry is healthy and performed very well in 2011, as shown in the official statistics, and the outlook is very positive for 2012.”

**George Ehrlich-Adam**  
General manager  
Exotissimo Travel Vietnam

Vietnam’s tourism industry is looking forward to a good 2012 after another year of growth in 2011.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism expects the country to welcome 5.3 to 5.5 million foreign tourists and see more than 30 million domestic trips in 2011.

January to October saw 4.83 million arrivals, a 15.8 per cent year-on-year increase.

Asian Trails’ group managing director, Laurent Kuenzle, said it was an excellent year for Vietnam in general and for Asian Trails in particular.

“The future of Vietnam’s tourism industry in 2012 looks bright. We expect an increase in revenue of 20 per cent over 2011.”

Kuenzle said all Asian Trails’ key source markets performed better than expected and there was additional business from new and existing longhaul markets. This included MICE movements.

According to data from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), the top 10 markets during the first



Halong Bay, Vietnam

Vietnam did brisk business in 2011 thanks to increased domestic and international air access and major improvements to the infrastructure. The country is expected to enjoy further growth this year, and achieve 10.3 million foreign visitors and 47.5 million domestic trips, with combined revenues of US\$19 billion, by 2020.

10 months of 2011 were China, South Korea, Japan, the US, Cambodia, Taiwan, Australia, Malaysia, France and Thailand – the majority of these registered growth.

Vietravel beat its 2011 target of a 15 per cent increase over 2010 by five per cent in revenue and 10 per cent in profit.

Vice general director, Tran Doan The Duy, said: “Compared to 2010, Vietravel experienced an

increase in the number of clients, revenue and gross profit at the rate of 15 per cent, 33 per cent and 35 per cent respectively.”

Tran said the success was all the greater as it had been achieved against a backdrop of economic problems and natural disasters in many of its main source markets.

As the industry looks forward to another healthy tourism year, VNAT is finalising its strategy

and master plan for tourism development until 2020. The country is expected to achieve 10.3 million foreign visitors and 47.5 million domestic trips, with revenue of US\$19 billion, by 2020.

The NTO is also developing a tourism promotion and marketing campaign that will include participation in trade shows such as ITB Berlin, MITT in Russia and this ATF in the first quarter of this year.



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**Hotels | Danang blazes expansion trail**

The steady growth in demand for Vietnam has fuelled a hotel development boom, with the bulk of new investment projects making a beeline for Danang, followed by Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi and other destinations in the central and southern coastal regions.

Exotissimo Travel Vietnam general manager, George Ehrlich-Adam, observed that the beach resort town of Danang welcomed approximately 700 new five-star guestrooms in 2011, and more were expected to come online this year.

Despite stiffer competition, Furama Resort Danang executive assistant manager, Nguyen Duc Quynh, said his resort had enjoyed good business between January and October last year, and hoped for an even better 2012. However, he added that it wasn't time for hotels and resorts in Danang to raise room rates.

"We hope that the new international terminal in Danang International Airport (opened last Christmas) will bring more travellers to Danang and help improve our occupancy rate, which stands at only 35 per cent to 60 per cent month to month," said Nguyen.

Patrick Basset, vice president of operations for Accor-Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan and South Korea, said the tourism trend was "quite positive".



Hotel de L'Opera Hanoi, a member of the MGallery Collection

He foresees a rate increase on the national level, but cautions that the increment would not match the healthy levels of growth seen in 2007 and 2008.

Accor is actively pursuing its expansion plans in Vietnam too. It will introduce its upscale Pullman brand to business destinations such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Vung Tau, and open an Ibis in Ho Chi Minh City to cater to the economy market.

Basset said: "Vietnam is a relatively new tourist destination, and the increase in international travellers these past few years

shows that demand for hotels in Vietnam is still running high. In particular, there is demand from business travellers looking for international standard accommodation, which taps into our mid-to-upper scale hotels perfectly."

It has also been observed that demand for midscale and economy hotels from domestic travellers is on the rise.

Other international hotel chains including InterContinental Hotels Group, Starwood Hotels and Resorts, Marriott Hotels and Resorts and Best Western International are also launching or expanding in Vietnam.

**Destination by the numbers**

**7.5** Vietnam's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism is targeting 7.5 million foreign arrivals and 35 million domestic trips that will generate between US\$8 billion and US\$9 billion in gross revenue in 2015, which will account for 5.5 per cent of gross domestic product.

**10** The ministry is hoping to achieve 10-15 million foreign visitors and 40-45 million domestic trips in 2020, which will generate US\$17-US\$18 billion in revenue and account for six to 6.5 per cent of gross domestic product.

**5.42** The number of foreign visitors to Vietnam between January and November last year hit 5.42 million, a 17.8 per cent growth over the same period in 2010. The country expects to have welcomed 5.3-5.5 million tourists for the whole of 2011.

**53.3** Vietnam's largest tourism source market, China, contributed 1.27 million visitors between January and November last year, representing a year-on-year increase of 53.3 per cent. South Korea and Japan followed with 483,480 and 434,007 arrivals respectively.

**63.3** Cambodian arrivals into Vietnam registered the largest growth in the first 11 months of 2011 – it grew 63.3 per cent to reach 381,659 arrivals, making it the fifth largest market for Vietnam. The increase is attributed to a visa exemption arrangement signed between the two countries in December 2008.

**3.29** Of the total foreign arrivals during the January-November 2011 period, a total of 3.29 million travellers visited Vietnam for leisure, 904,038 for business and 907,880 for visiting relatives.

**19** There are 12,000 accommodation properties offering 235,000 rooms in Vietnam, but only 19 per cent belong to the three- to five-star categories. There are 48 five-star hotels, 110 four-star hotels and 235 three-star hotels.

Sources: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and Vietnam National Administration of Tourism

**Airline | Any extra capacity welcomed**

Recent additions to air services between Vietnam and Europe by Vietnam Airlines (VNA), Turkish Airlines and Air France are expected to give Vietnam's tourism performance stronger wings.

VNA inaugurated a four-times-weekly direct service from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to London in December, and plans to turn the service into a daily flight by 2015.

Throughout 2011, the flag carrier also grew its Asian network. It boosted its twice-daily Hanoi-Kuala Lumpur service to

thrice daily in May, and turned its five-weekly Hanoi-Ho Chi Minh City-Melbourne and six-weekly Hanoi-Ho Chi Minh City-Sydney links into daily services in June. VNA's Hanoi-Singapore service was also increased from three to four weekly flights in July.

More growth can be expected of VNA's network, as it has been given the green light to lease eight new Airbus A321-200 aircraft and purchase 26 aircraft of the same type. The new fleet will be delivered by 2015.

VNA plans to increase its fleet to 115 aircraft by 2015 and 165 by 2020, from its current 70.

Foreign airlines also strengthened their reach in Vietnam last year. Turkish Airlines boosted its Bangkok-Ho Chi Minh City links from four-times-weekly to daily in July. Jetstar Asia launched a four-weekly Hanoi-Singapore service from December 15, after raising its Ho Chi Minh City-Singapore service frequency from twice- to thrice-weekly in August.

Exotissimo Travel Vietnam

general manager, George-Ehrlich Adam, said: "The direct flights linking Vietnam with the UK will mainly benefit the UK market, but additional capacity on Turkish Airlines, more regular flights from France by Air France, as well as increased direct air access from Russia will all contribute to added seats into Vietnam."

Asian Trails group manager director, Laurent Kuenzle, said: "Any additional air capacity to Vietnam from any carrier is most welcome."

Kuenzle explained that Viet-

nam would not only benefit from increased capacity, but also from destination marketing efforts by the various airlines and the opportunity to invite tour operators, travel consultants and the media on familiarisation trips.

At press time, direct air access between Vietnam and India is also on the cards, following a memorandum of understanding inked between Vietnam Airlines and India's largest private carrier, Jet Airways. Under the deal, the carriers will jointly evaluate the possibility of direct services.



Rowing on the Ba Be Lake, Bac Kan Province

# Gunning for cooperation

Patrick Tan captures the camaraderie at meetings, well-attended by both the private and public sectors



Giving a mighty cheer to continuous dialogue between ASEAN and UNWTO are (from left to right) Ministry of Hotels and Tourism Myanmar's U Htay Aung, Department of Tourism Philippines' Ramon R Jimenez, Singapore Tourism Board's Aw Kah Peng, Ministry of Tourism and Sports Thailand's Sombat Kuruphan, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism's Nguyen Van Tuan, ASEAN-China Centre's Ma Mingqiang, UNWTO's Taleb Rifai, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy Indonesia's Mari Elka Pangestu, ASEAN Japan-Centre's Yoshikuni Ohnishi, ASEAN-Korea Centre's Young Jai Cho, Ministry of Industry and Primary Resource Brunei's Yahya Bakar, Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's Thong Khon, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism Laos' Bosengkham Vongdara, Ministry of Tourism Malaysia's Ng Yen Yen and ASEAN Secretariat's Somsak Pipoppinyo



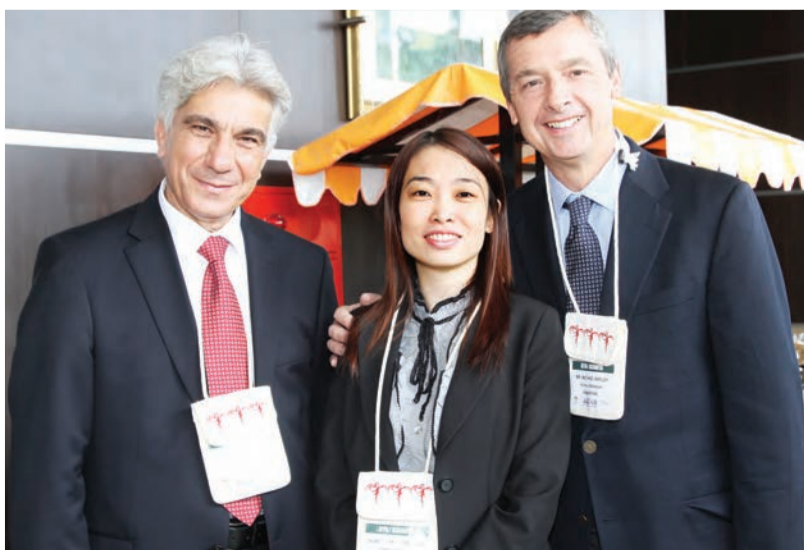
Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Indonesia's Mari Elka Pangestu



Brunei Tourism's Md Riza Md Yunos



Myevents Malaysia's Norman Kumar and Shahul Hameed Dawood



Royal Caribbean Cruises' Nikolaos Antalis, Jennifer Yap and Michael Bayley



Singapore Tourism Board's Lawrence Leong, Aw Kah Peng, Christina Chan, Ong Huey Hong and Oliver Chong



# A convivial green affair

An award ceremony lauding the best eco-practices, followed by a morning on the course. By [Patrick Tan](#)



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