



New Thai-Cambodia visa

ASEAN moves closer towards single visa goal, starting with two countries

By Shekhar Niyogi

IN A significant first, Thailand and Cambodia have announced they will issue a single 30-day tourist visa to non-ASEAN visitors from February 1, with Vietnam and Laos to be brought into the ambit by end-2012.

ATF buyers welcomed the change enthusiastically. Aynur San, general manager, Turkey-based Oniva Tours, said: "It will benefit us as we will now pick destinations and products from two or more countries and not worry about itinerary changes due to unforeseen events, say the Bangkok flood."

Frauke Melchert, Germany-based Meeting Consult Interna-

tional, added: "This is best for bringing more MICE events to ASEAN. Now I can plan multi-country incentives and many combinations of events. I hope more countries will be added," she said.

Michael Lim, managing director of Cambodia-based Dara Hotels and Resorts, was similarly optimistic about the prospects for MICE, giving an example of how a convention in Thailand could be combined with incentives or post-tours in Cambodia.

He said: "Tourists can now come with different objectives, for instance, wellness tourism for Cambodia and beach tourism for Thailand."

Jose Henrique Goncalves, managing director, France-based Abako said: "Business travel will also benefit hugely because of the flexibility a multi-country visa offers".

Echoing their views, Virat Chatturaputpitak, vice president of the Association of Thai Travel Agents and managing director Marwin Tours (Thailand) said immediate benefits could be expected from "cross-border travel with itineraries involving destinations of both countries".

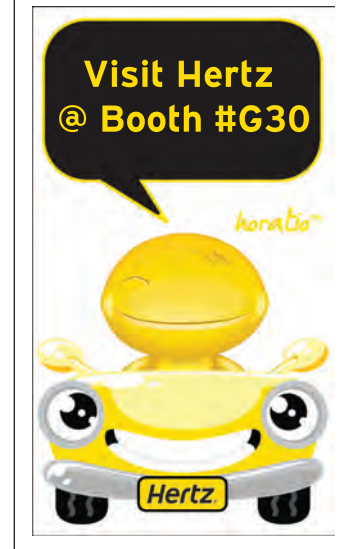
Cambodia's minister of tourism, Thong Khon, revealed that the next step would be "to include Laos and Vietnam, develop the road network well and offer

our four countries as a package to foreign visitors, a unique concept offering in Asia".

The vision of a single visa enabling seamless travel across 10 ASEAN countries was one of the recurring topics discussed at ATF this year, with countries pledging to take serious steps in working towards its implementation.

It is easier said than done though, given the different visa policies across member states. Indonesia and Myanmar, for example, require pre-travel visas for reciprocal travel, an anomaly they wish to rectify by the end of the year.

ASEANTA's secretary general Mohd Ilyas Zainol Abidin was



insistent that the kinks must be ironed out. He said: "In Schengen, they have difficulties too, but the single visa has been successful and (likewise) our benefits (of an ASEAN visa) will far outweigh the obstacles".

Viewpoint When will ASEAN have a common visa?



"All ASEAN nations have set a deadline of 2013 for identifying, rationalising and highlighting areas that need to be addressed. We see the visa developing in stages, initially including a few countries and gradually, all."

Mari Elka Pangestu
Minister of tourism and creative economy
Indonesia



"It is a complex task because of the diversity among ASEAN nations. It involves issues of security, immigration and tourism. (The actual implementation) will be more like 2020."

Ng Yen Yen
Minister of tourism
Malaysia

Bulgaria, Estonia burst forth

By Brian Higgs

IF THERE is any concern about traditional longhaul markets slowing down, a handful of emerging markets in Europe is providing reason to cheer.

Representatives from Bulgarian travel firms Albena Holidays, Pink-Tours and Sofia Luxury Travel, all at ATF for the first time, have seen robust growth in Asia-bound bookings in recent times.

Sofia-based Albena Holidays now handles an average of 20 groups a year, each with about 20-50 pax, to destinations such as China, Japan, South Korea and Thailand, up from two to three groups when it first started selling Asia five years ago, said its general manager, Albena Aleksieva. The demand hike – which is highly seasonal and peaks in winter – is attributed to clients' growing perception of Asia as exotic and value-for-money.

"The Bulgarian economy is growing and people are thirsty for new places. They used to go to neighbouring countries; now they want to go farther," she said.

While she used to depend on wholesalers for Asia programmes, Aleksieva is now

sourcing for her own local suppliers.

Burgas-based Pink-Tours saw a 20 per cent jump last year in Asian bookings, which consists mainly of FITs to Thailand and Malaysia, said its manager, Milena Nikolova.

Albena Holidays' clients spend 1,200-1,800 euros (US\$1,540-US\$2,310) per pax, including airfare, while Pink-Tours' clients spend about 1,400 euros, excluding airfare.

Luxury FITs to ASEAN were also up for Sofia Luxury Travel, said its director, Diana Lozanova. "They spend an average of 2,500 euros and above per person, not including airfare," she added.

Demand from Estonia for ASEAN is on the rise too, thanks to improved air links, according to Tallinn-based Fiesta Reised chairman, Heldur Allese. The agency sends 500-600 pax a year to the region, and has seen a 20 per cent annual growth in recent years.

Daily Helsinki-Singapore services launched last May by Finnair were a boost, as Estonia had already been connected via a 20-minute flight to Helsinki.

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Charting the way forward

This year's ASEAN Goes Green theme saw keynote speaker UNWTO secretary general Taleb Rifai encouraging the trade to take an active stance in cultivating sustainable tourism practices. He also revealed that tourism in ASEAN grew at a rate double that of tourism worldwide in 2011, pointing out that worldwide tourism arrivals crossed the one billion mark in 2011 and tourism receipts totalled US\$1.1 trillion. "We expect the trend to continue into 2012 despite a modest slowdown in the global tourism sector," he told the *Daily*. He also said that there was still room for improvement in air connectivity among ASEAN countries and that the move towards visa exemption within the bloc would be another key driver of growth. – Linda Haden



Melia Bali's Jim Boyles, Asia-Pacific CHRIE's Andy Nazarechuk, PATA's Martin Craigs, Karma Events Indonesia's David Sanders and Japan Association of Travel Agents' Tatsuro Nakamura



Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy Indonesia's Soufie Rosalind, Chrismastutie and Adella Raung



Kyotango City Tourism Promotion Section's Shigeki Nakajima, Mayor of Kyotango City's Yasushi Nakayama, and Kyotango City Tourism Association's Katsuhisa Fukuyama and Makoto Morishita

Laying the groundwork

Delegates get prepped and the ASEAN Tourism Conference offers an insight into trends. By **Patrick Tan**



Peak Adventure Travel Group Thailand's Yata Ketchai (right)



Bali Megah Wisata Tours & Travel's Jeffry Budiman



Mesa Stila Indonesia's Sugeng Sugiantoro and Bali Rasha Tour & Travel Service's Wawa Lin Arjaya



Patron Travel Poland's Zbigniew Swed and Supertour Lufthansa City Center Poland's Andrzej Rutkowski



Penang Global Tourism's Foo Yu Keong and Karen Kee



Lily Travel Singapore's Lily Low and David Chua



Abako France's José Henrique Gonçalves

EU carbon tax hangs heavy

Fears of airlines passing on tax to passengers grips travel consultants

By Shekhar Niyogi

EUROPEAN travel consultants are bracing themselves for dips in business as a result of the Emissions Trading Scheme, which comes into effect this month.

German carrier Lufthansa has confirmed that it will pass on the cost of the EU carbon tax of approximately 130 million euros (US\$166 million) to their customers, while Cathay Pacific and Singapore Airlines are likely to do the same, according to their GSAs.

With higher airfares looming on the horizon, European travel consultants at ATF told the *Daily* that itineraries to Asia would have to be repackaged to include cheaper accommodation and lesser frills, and run for shorter durations.

Jose Henrique Goncalves, managing director of France-based Abako Creation d'Evenements, pointed out that the resulting higher airfares would hit longhaul travel the hardest.

"In a depressed economic situation, any cost addition will affect decisions, especially on longhaul travel," said Goncalves.

Belgium-based Asteria Expedition's travel advisor, Herman Hannon, said: "The rich will pay without demur but middle-class tourists will rethink their holidays. We will need to repackage".

Clients were expected to shorten trips from 10 days to seven, said Hannon and Francesco Lazzari, general manager of Italy's Fly Tour and Congress.

UK-based Complete India & Asia's owners, Stuart and Margaret Miller, said a roundtrip to India could cost 350 pounds (US\$538) more in future and warned that arrivals from the UK to Asia could fall by 15 per cent.

Asian carriers that fly to Europe have flatly refused to pay up and threatened retaliation (see related story below).

Air China, China Southern Airlines, China Eastern Airlines and Hainan Airlines, which fly millions of passengers to Europe annually, have estimated a collective cost hit of RMB 800 million (US\$126 million) in the first year.

India expects the tax to raise airfares by 40-220 euros per sector, and its retaliation could lead to even higher airfares – it may impose a similar tax on all European carriers operating in and out of India if the EU carbon tax is levied.

"Longhaul carriers do not occupy as much airspace time (as European airlines), so it is wrong to be taxed equally."

Felix Cruz

Vice president marketing, Philippine Airlines

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AirAsia X retaliates

LONGHAUL low-cost carrier, AirAsia X will suspend services to Europe by the end of March in response to the combined impact from a weak global economy, rising jet fuel prices and soaring taxes.

The network realignment will see the suspension of four-weekly services to Paris after March 30 and six-weekly services to London after March 31.

Despite healthy load factors of over 80 per cent on the carrier's London and Paris services in 2011, CEO Azran Osman-Rani explained that the changes were necessitated by "continued high jet fuel prices and the weakening demand for air travel from Europe, brought about by the current economic situation together with exorbitant government taxes, (which) have placed cost pressures on operating longhaul low cost flights between Asia and Europe.

"The implementation of the Emissions Trading Scheme and the escalating Air Passenger Duty taxes in the UK, which will rise yet again in April, has forced our decision to withdraw."

The carrier is also exiting Mumbai and reducing its New Delhi's daily links to four a week in March, due to "continued visa restrictions" and a 280 per cent increase in airport and handling charges.



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In brief

Lao teaser

Laos, host of next year's ATF in Vientiane, will offer delegates a taste of what 2013's event will bring. Held this evening at Sutanraja Hotel Manado, Lao Night will showcase the destination's unique hospitality and rich culture. All ATF 2012 delegates are welcome.

MAI spreads its wings

MYANMAR Airways International (MAI) is starting a new daily flight in the Bangkok-Singapore-Bangkok sector from February, deploying Airbus A320 with 150 seats and A321 with 210 seats.

As well, to facilitate travel on their busiest routes, Guangzhou, Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, MAI is offering visas on arrival (VOA) for passengers of any nationality.

Ye Jhan, country manager (Thailand & Cambodia) confirmed that the VOA arrangements had helped to increase business travel to Myanmar.

"We are looking at acquiring more aircraft to support the opening of new routes within ASEAN and to other Asian destinations", he said. – **Shekhar Niyogi**

Numbers that matter

438 The total number of booths from the 10 ASEAN member countries exhibiting at ATF 2012. The largest exhibiting contingent is Indonesia, with 112 booths.

390 The number of buyers from 51 countries, with new representations from Bulgaria, Kuwait, Egypt and New Zealand.

48 The percentage of buyers from the Asia-Pacific region. European buyers were the second-largest region represented (37.6 per cent), followed by the Americas (7.8 per cent) and the Middle East (2.6 per cent).



Year of events

Malaysia's 2012 highlight is a 600,000-visitor tourism expo

By Brian Higgs

TOURISM Malaysia will focus its global marketing efforts on promoting events and festivals taking place in the country this year, with a first-of-its-kind Malaysia International Tourism Exchange (MITE) to be a calendar heavyweight.

Speaking to the *Daily*, Tourism Malaysia acting director general Azizan Noordin said: "We will be concentrating on marketing the year's events under the umbrella brand of Luxury Malaysia."

"Our strategy will involve participating in international travel trade fairs and seminars, public relations and advertising activities, and organising hosted fam trips for foreign travel consultants and media."

About 40 per cent of its total marketing budget of RM130 million (US\$41.5 million) has been set aside to do this.

Under the initiative, Malaysia will promote events such the Kuala Lumpur International Shoe Festival, the Rainforest



Kumar: time to bring Malaysia to the world

World Music Festival in Sarawak and the ASEAN Food Heritage Trail. Key highlights of the year are the 61st PATA Conference from April 20-22 and MITE 2012 from May 31-June 3.

With the latter, Azizan said this would be the first time Malaysia is organising an international tourism exchange.

To be held at the Malaysia Agro Exposition Park Serdang, the event will span five halls: an international hall, a Malaysia hall, an Asian hall, a China hall, a B2C hall and a hall featuring Asian cuisine. Up to 600,000 visitors and 1,500 exhibitors from 25 countries are expected.

Norman Kumar, group deputy CEO of the event organiser, My-events International, said: "The concept is a tourism exchange, not a fair. It will bring Malaysia

to the world, and the world to Malaysia."

He added: "It is definitely on a bigger scale compared to ATF or ITB Asia, which focuses on bringing overseas traffic to ASEAN and Asia respectively. MITE has a focus on ASEAN, with Asia as a bigger picture, and the globe as the overall picture."

Azizan added that the NTO would also be promoting religious festivals and sales campaigns throughout the year, including the 1Malaysia Mega Sale Carnival and the Malaysia Year-End Sale.

Tourism Malaysia's efforts complement the Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau's (MyCEB) aim to position the country as an entry point for international organisations wanting to engage with Asian businesses through events. MyCEB launched a new brand identity, Asia's Business Events Hub, last November. In 2012, Malaysia is targeting 24.5 million overseas arrivals and RM58 billion in tourism receipts.

More Singapore-Sulawesi traffic

By Mimi Hudoyo

A NEW initiative to attract inbound traffic from Singapore to Sulawesi is in the making with a plan to sell Manado-Makassar packages riding on a codeshare agreement between SilkAir and Garuda Indonesia.

Visit Indonesia Tourism Officer (VITO) Singapore country manager, Sulaiman Shehdek, said: "SilkAir has four weekly services between Singapore and Manado (North Sulawesi), while Garuda Indonesia has a daily service between Singapore and Makassar (South Sulawesi), and a number of flights between Makassar and Manado."

As such, travellers from Singapore and other countries can pick any day of the week to visit Manado and Makassar."

"Both airlines have approached VITO Singapore to link them up with the North Sulawesi Tourism Promotion Board (NSTPB) and South Sulawesi Tourism Board to create two-city leisure traffic."

Five-day/four-night packages with two nights in Manado and two nights in Makassar are being discussed, which should be ready in time for Singapore's mid-year school holidays.

Fam trips for Singapore's travel consultants and the media to North and South Sulawesi from March 3-7 are also being planned.

"Manado has always been known as a diving destination. Now we need the destination to come up with ideas on what they can offer leisure travellers in

particular, but also MICE," said Sulaiman.

NSTB executive director Widijanto said: "We will be responsible for the groundhandling and are working out the details with VITO Singapore."

"The cooperation with VITO Singapore is just the beginning. We are trying to expand our market, and cooperation with VITO is the way to go. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has VITOs in 11 destinations (worldwide), and we are working with them."

One example is a partnership with VITO France, said Widijanto. "We are trying to get more of the European market, and VITO France is looking for new destinations (beyond Bali) for special interest tours."

India, ASEAN join hands for tourism

WITH a stroke of the pen, India and ASEAN member states made history on January 12 by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that will lead to cooperation on several levels to boost each other's tourism business.

Areas of cooperation include human resource, technology transfers, infrastructure development, bilateral investments in the tourism and hospitality sector, full liberalisation for airlines to increase flights and mutual marketing campaigns.

An office for monitoring its future has been set up by ASEAN in Mumbai.

The MoU's biggest allure is the potential for air liberalisation. Indian private airlines, thus far constrained by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation from flying many of the available international routes, may now break free from the shackles.

The promotion of Buddhist pilgrimage tours will also be significant in the mutual exchange, and a highlight in the bilateral

partnership this year is an ASEAN-India car rally that will run from Batam to New Delhi.

Cooperation will also manifest in areas such as cruise development along the Indian coastline and parts of ASEAN, and tourism flow enhancements.

With 4.5 million Indians travelling to ASEAN in 2010, the growth in bilateral tourism is expected to be exponential. The region is expecting 107 million global arrivals by 2015. – **Shekhar Niyogi**

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Symbiosis, which services mostly British, European and American clients and some expatriates in Asia, is especially interested in new eco, adventure and community-based products, especially cycling tours in Sulawesi.

Email Anh Austin of the company's Phnom Penh office at anh@symbiosis-travel.com or visit www.symbiosis-travel.com. – **Brian Higgs**

Indochina hotels and tour operators sought

SEATTLE-based Red Lantern Journeys is sourcing for local partners in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, especially hotels and tour operators, as it widens its Indochina offerings.

Its clients have budgets of about US\$2,000-US\$3,000, excluding airfare, and stay an average of 10-12 days. The company currently operates mostly FIT and some GIT tours to Bali, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Tioman and Borneo.

Visit redlanternjourneys.com to contact Ambrose Bittner, founder and CEO. – **Brian Higgs**



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Singapore remains strong

Despite the gathering clouds of economic uncertainty Singapore's tourism trade is continuing on its unerring upwards trajectory. Reports by **Linda Haden**



Marina Bay Sands

Courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board

Singapore's tourism industry is still climbing relentlessly, despite the uncertainty plaguing the global financial markets. Escalating hotel rates alongside a shortage in qualified manpower are still the primary issues tourism stakeholders struggle with. Hotel rates are expected to climb in 2012, although this will be somewhat muted in comparison to 2011.

Inbound travel professionals in Singapore are satisfied with the results for 2011, despite bumps along the way, including a string of natural disasters within Japan and South-east Asia, as well as the ongoing economic turmoil in Europe.

Pacific World Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia regional director Manuel Ferrer said: "We have closed and it has been an outstanding year – our financial year runs from October to September. In MICE we have delivered our best results ever."

Judy Lum, senior vice president, sales & marketing, Tour East Group, was tight-lipped on the performance of her firm. However she stated that "for

both leisure and MICE we are fortunate that Australia is one of our primary markets and that our foray into India, China and Russia helped to fill the gaps left by the slowdown from UK as well as Europe – our main sources of business – for 2011".

However, there were still a few niggling issues that inbound travel professionals and destination management companies believe will continue to undermine Singapore's success.

Lum mentioned that skyrocketing hotel rates were making it difficult for DMCs to pass on value to their clients.

"Asian markets and regional corporates are booming, thereby pushing up Singapore hotels'

average occupancy and average room rates," she said.

"It has not been possible to embark on any promotional campaigns to drum up arrivals as the hotels do not see the need for it."

Hotel rates are also proving to be a bane for MICE organisers such as Rosalind Ng, managing director (Asia), IIR Exhibitions. "Hotel rates in Singapore are climbing higher and higher. This effectively dissuades individuals from coming over as we command much higher rates than neighbouring countries.

"Event managers have to grapple with lower yields – only the fittest will eventually survive," she said.

Getting the right people in is another major issue that travel companies in Singapore still have to contend with.

Ferrer said: "We are a growing company in a very small and successful country with almost full employment, so to recruit and retain talent is a challenge. This is my first priority. Young talent is what will guarantee you keep being a successful company."

Overall, DMCs are relatively positive but wary of what lies ahead in 2012, owing to the gathering clouds of economic uncertainty on the horizon.

"We are just waiting to see how damaging the economic challenges in Europe and the US is on our business," said Ferrer.

My take

"The high-end leisure segment has done particularly well for us. There are so many premier offerings ... Singapore is certainly not a city that can be described as lacklustre."

Yvonne Low

Executive director, The Traveller DMC

NTO | Hitting the tourism targets

Between January and August 2011, as outlined by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), some 8.8 million tourists visited Singapore, a 15.5 per cent increase on the same period in 2010. While Indonesia is still the top source market in terms of visitor volume, China now sits in second place, Malaysia third, Australia fourth and India now ranks fifth.

STB did not offer the *Daily* any projections for this year but according to a spokesperson, Singapore is

well on its way to meet its 2015 tourism targets of S\$30 billion (US\$23.6 billion) in tourist receipts and visitor arrival numbers of 17 million.

Oliver Chong, director, communications, Singapore Tourism Board, said the YourSingapore destination branding

would be used again this year. When asked about STB's upcoming marketing plans and strategies, Chong



Chong: create value

said that "Singapore strives to stay ahead of the evolving needs of our consumers and to constantly create value for our visitors by providing innovative solutions that will enhance their Singapore experience".

He added that STB, together with its regional offices, would study and understand the changing needs of Singapore's various tourism segments.

Moving ahead, Chong explained that STB would "work with our industry to enhance the delivery of innovative products and experiences to address the needs of our visitors, as well as strengthen the capabilities of our workforce to deliver the intended value propositions".

For MICE, STB will continue to build Singapore as a hub for business events, and constantly improve existing infrastructure to meet the evolving needs of the MICE industry. For instance, the NTO provided sup-

port for Singapore Expo's upgrading of facilities and the construction of its upcoming new meetings venue, Max Atria, opening early this year.

When probed about the anticipated challenges that lie ahead for Singapore's tourism industry, Chong said Asia had "proven its mettle", and that it was crucial for the tourism industry to come together to discuss how to leverage the growth in the region while sustaining its momentum at the same time.

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Hotels | Further rate hikes on the way

Hotel rates in Singapore have continued to climb since the downturn of 2008-09, and as of August last year, as outlined by STB, ARR stood at S\$241.40 (US\$188), an increase of 5.8 per cent since the start of the year and 7.4 per cent over the same month in 2010. The average occupancy rate hit 85 per cent in August 2011, after reaching a high of 93 per cent in July. Upscale hotels saw the biggest increase in ARR in August over the previous August.

“Given the fact that there is not going to be a dramatic injection of room supply and that there are no real signs of the economy slowing down, we anticipate ARR to increase by five to 10 per cent in 2012,” said Jonas Ogren, director-Asia, STR Global.

Robert McIntosh, executive director, CBRE Hotels was also upbeat, and predicted that ARR would jump by 15 per cent by the end of 2011. “I believe that this rate of growth is sustainable owing to the plethora of new attractions in the pipeline for Singapore in the next 12 months,” he stated.

Lim Ee Jin, director of marketing communications, Fairmont Singapore & Swissôtel The Stamford, said: “We remain optimistic that hotel rates will continue to



Courtesy of Fairmont Singapore & Swissôtel The Stamford

rise in 2012 and occupancy will grow as well. Our projected major arrivals are mostly from the Asia-Pacific region, and we expect that travellers from these countries will continue to head down to Singapore either for meetings and conferences or simply to enjoy the new attractions the island nation has to offer.”

More than 2,000 new rooms will be added to Singapore’s hotel room supply this year, upping the number of keys to well over 43,000 by year-end. Days Inn, W Hotel and Ramada will be making their debuts in Singapore.

“I see no danger of a room oversupply in 2012. Even if the new room supply begins to seep in, if occupancy and demand

levels remain the same, hotels still have the opportunity to increase rates gradually over time,” explained Ogren.

Mid-market and upscale properties will be the main beneficiaries of the expected influx of arrivals this year, as Singapore continues to be a top business and leisure destination.

However, McIntosh sounded a word of caution. “Things can turnaround quickly if events such as a terrorist attack, flu epidemic or the euro crash occurs. We are dealing with so much uncertainty,” he said. “Nonetheless, Singapore’s economic fundamentals still look good, and all property types should continue to flourish for the foreseeable future.”

Destination by the numbers

2.6 Brunei was the only ASEAN country whose visitor numbers to Singapore fell between January and August 2011 – a drop of 2.6 per cent. In 2010, visitor numbers from Brunei rose by 10 per cent, making it Singapore’s slowest growing ASEAN source market.

11.2 Singapore Changi Airport registered an 11.2 per cent growth in passenger traffic to 3.86 million movements for August 2011, compared to the same period the year before. Demand was strongest for flights to and from Bangkok, Bali, Hong Kong, Manila and Tokyo.

19.3 Indonesian Mastercard holders spent a whopping S\$19.3 million (US\$14.8 million) in Singapore during the 2011 Great Singapore Sale. Most of the money was spent on purchases made in Singapore’s department stores.

30.8 Although it accounts for a less than 15 per cent market share of all ASEAN arrivals to Singapore, traffic from the Philippines grew the fastest in the first eight months of 2011, increasing by 30.8 per cent.

93 Average occupancy rates in Singapore hit a record high of 93 per cent in July 2011, compared to the year-to-July 2011 average of 86 per cent.

2,200 Marina Bay Sands sealed more than 2,200 MICE-related deals as of October 2011. This included MICE, weddings and special events at venues such as the Skypark on the highest floor of the resort, and the ArtScience Museum.

162,900 When it opens in June (first phase) this year, the new Gardens by the Bay, which sits diagonally across from Marina Bay Sands, will feature 162,900 plants from 200 species placed on 18 constructed tree-like displays.

820,000 Asia’s very first River Safari, scheduled to open in the third quarter of this year, is expected to receive some 820,000 visitors yearly.

Airline | The battle for Singapore skies

Singapore Airlines (SIA) took a battering during the 2009-10 financial year, when it incurred an eye-watering net loss of S\$182 million (US\$142 million). The company was back in the black by 2010-11, but profitability declined steadily, as escalating fuel prices and weak load factors ate into margins. In the 2010-11 financial year, the group announced a net profit of S\$380 million in the second quarter, followed by S\$288 million in the third, dwindling to S\$171 million in the fourth.

SIA anticipates increasing passenger capacity by five per cent in 2011-12 even though it is reducing the size of its fleet. However, SIA faces the uphill task of fill-

ing economy seats, especially on longhaul routes, where demand remains weak and resistance to fare hikes and fuel surcharges is strong. Plans are also afoot to deploy Airbus A380 aircraft on its daily Singapore to Frankfurt and New York flights this month.

Owing to the ongoing economic turmoil across Europe and the US, demand to and from longhaul destinations has plunged, making it likely that SIA will be outperformed, at least financially, by South-east Asia’s flourishing low-cost carriers (LCCs) which are on an aggressive expansion spree.

In May, AirAsia X announced it was targeting Japan and the Middle East, while JetStar Asia

signalled its intention in July 2011 to use its Singapore hub to enter more cities in North Asia and other destinations in South-east Asia, including Vietnam. Jetstar Asia also aims to add Europe and the US to its international network once it takes delivery of the Boeing 787 Dreamliner later this year. Athens, Munich, Rome and Milan are said to be on the shortlist.

In a bid to combat the threat posed by LCCs, SIA announced in May 2011 that it was establishing a medium- and longhaul LCC. The company hopes it will be operational by the second quarter of this year. The new airline would enable SIA to offload underperforming destinations,

while permitting it to embrace new leisure destinations that do not fit SIA’s current business model.

The Boeing 777-200 plane currently in SIA’s fleet has been selected as the aircraft of choice for the new LCC, which has been named Scoot. A total of 16 aircraft will be deployed, putting SIA’s new incarnation on a faster growth trajectory than its closest rival, Malaysia’s AirAsia X.

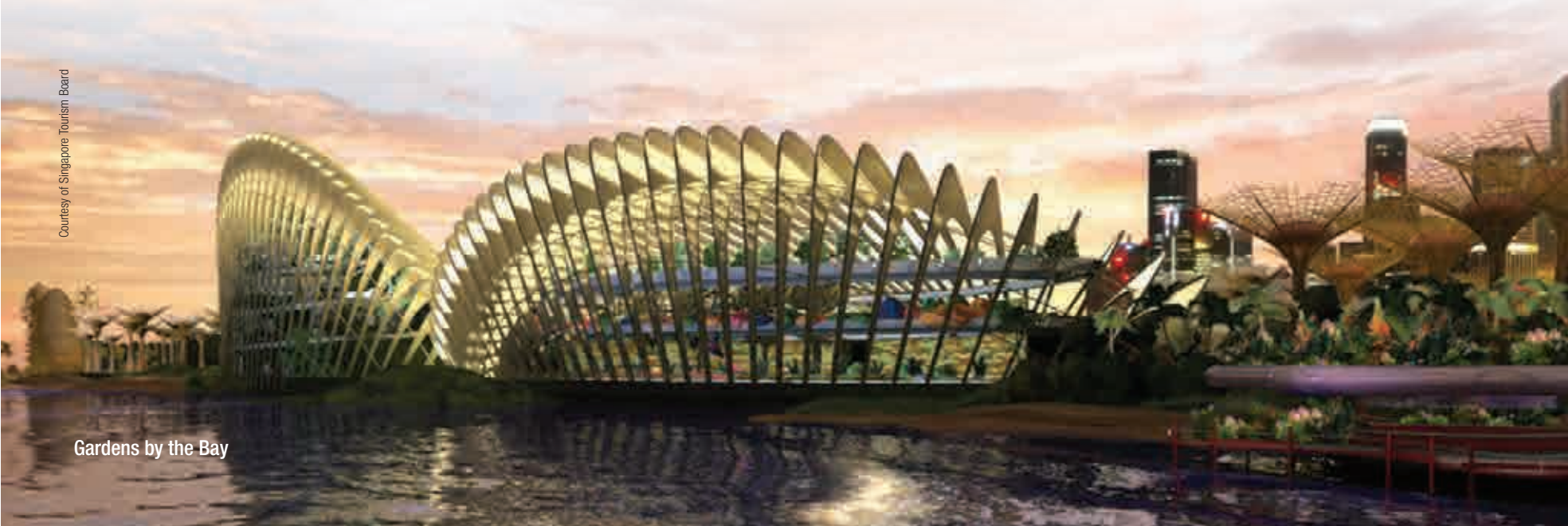
Arguably, the impact of SIA’s foray into the low-cost arena will be immense, and other major flag carriers in the region could be compelled to start longhaul low-cost subsidiaries. Furthermore, if SIA’s new subsidiary takes off, the expansion will most likely

be accelerated, and competition with Jetstar Asia and AirAsia X is sure to intensify.

“Given SIA’s past strategic moves, they could well shape this emerging segment (of longhaul LCCs), putting their mark on it. I believe SIA will make a canny play at it,” said Robert Bailey, president and CEO, Abacus International.

Another threat to SIA’s dominance looms on the horizon. Qantas announced in August 2011 that it would establish a premium airline in Asia. It was supposedly considering Singapore or Hong Kong as a base. But the plan might be scuppered by its on-going battle with the union.

Courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board



Gardens by the Bay

New attractions to boost tourism in Malaysia's southern region

Iskandar Malaysia, an integrated development project in Johor is set to accelerate the growth of Malaysia's tourism industry with several major tourism-related developments. Once completed in 2025 it is slated to become the southern gateway into Malaysia for tourists and business travellers.

Among its first tourism offerings is the recently launched Johor Premium Outlet (also the first in South East Asia), a factory outlet poised to offer "affordable luxury" to shoppers. Big name brands like Tumi, Coach, Ralph Lauren, Salvatore Ferragamo, Brook Brothers, Guess, Nike and Burberry provide factory direct savings of 25 percent to 65 percent every day. The Johor Premium Outlet is projected to attract four million visitors annually.

Besides investments in food, dining and shopping, Iskandar Malaysia's blueprint also includes development across six other sub-sectors, i.e. theme parks and family entertainment centres; history, heritage, arts and culture; eco-tourism and homestays; outdoor activities, events and recreational tourism; health and wellness tourism and business tourism, all geared to provide a diverse tourism experience no matter what the tourist profile is.

Family Friendly

Asia's first LEGOLAND theme park in Iskandar Malaysia is expected to open its doors some time this year, the main highlight being the miniature replicas of famous buildings and structures across Asia, including Malaysia's Petronas Twin Towers, the tallest twin building in the world. Other projects nearing completion are an indoor theme park of well-loved children's TV characters and an outdoor theme park.

Marina Development

Also in the works is the 688-acre Puteri Harbour, the southernmost marina on mainland Asia with potential as a sailing destination. Due for completion in 2013, the development will consist of prime waterfront properties, retail shops, food and beverage outlets, a transport hub, a marina (berthing, chandlery, and accommodation facilities for boaters, yachters) and a cultural park.

Ecotourism

Also being promoted are the ecotourism attractions here – close to 2,000 hectares of national parks, forest reserve and wetlands. Chief among them are the wetlands surrounding Pulau River, Kukup Island and Piai Cape – recognised by the Ramsar Convention as internationally important sites for the conservation and sustainable utilisation of wetlands. In fact, Kukup Island is one of the world's largest uninhabited mangrove islands.

Heritage Walk

Banking on Johor's rich history, a historic enclave will be identified and developed consisting of existing

streets, pathways and buildings with heritage value. This will be supported by services and activities promoting local history and folklore, cultural activities and festivals.

Business Tourism

Another sector which will see further investments is Iskandar Malaysia's business tourism offerings. Currently, the Persada Johor International

Convention Centre and Danga Bay Convention Centre can accommodate up to 7,000 and 2,000 participants respectively. Traders Hotel, slated to open this year, will cater to the growing demand of business travellers to the region.

Health And Wellness Tourism

Upcoming healthcare developments in Iskandar Malaysia include the Regency

Specialist Hospital, Columbia Asia Hospital and the establishment of a wellness township to leverage on the increasing demand for health and wellness tourism services.

For more information on Iskandar Malaysia, please visit their website at: www.iskandarmalaysia.com.my

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Malaysia dons a new look

A world of possibilities opens up with fresh connections, attractions and hotels, reports N Nithiyanthan



Lost World Tin Valley

Lost World Hotel

The Lost World of Tambun theme park in Ipoh has nearly doubled the room inventory of its onsite hotel. The Lost World Hotel, which opened with 96 keys in May last year, added a second block of 78 keys in December. The new block also features a meeting room with capacity for 200 people.

Contact

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Email: adrianpa@sunway.com.my
www.sunwaylostworldoftambun.com

Lost World of Tambun

The Lost World of Tambun theme park in Ipoh also added a dedicated teambuilding venue in November. The new attraction features a series of high rope elements designed to showcase the theme park's special limestone environment. Facilities include a high-rope course, a 19.8m para jump, a wild woosy team challenge, a 30m via feratta (road with irons) rock climb and natural abseil (which claims to be the first in the region), and a 120m quadruple zip line.

Contact

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Email: adrianpa@sunway.com.my
www.sunwaylostworldoftambun.com

Pullman Kuala Lumpur Bangsar

Accor will open its third Pullman-branded property in Malaysia – the Pullman Kuala Lumpur Bangsar – in the first quarter of 2012. Situated in the Bangsar district, the hotel is near the Mid Valley Megamall and the main business, entertainment and shopping areas. The property will feature 513 guestrooms and suites, 11 meeting rooms and two ballrooms that can accommodate up to 2,000 guests. These facilities will be complemented by seven F&B outlets, a swimming pool, a fitness centre, a spa and a business centre.

Contact

Harriet Hoong
Tel: (603) 2240-0888
Email: dmc@pullmankualalumpur.com
www.accorhotels.com/asia

AirAsia flies to Danang

AirAsia commenced in December direct flights from Kuala Lumpur to Danang, the carrier's third destination in Vietnam after Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The carrier provides four weekly services on this route, flying every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. Danang is also the airline's seventh destination in Indochina; the others are Siem Reap and Phnom Penh (Cambodia), Vientiane (Laos)



Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre



and Yangon (Myanmar).

Contact

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E-mail: anitahayatimhadi@airasia.com
www.airasia.com/my/en/followuson.page

MyCEB website

The Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) launched in November a revamped standalone website showcasing the organisation's new brand identity, Asia's Business Events Hub, as well as a Quick Response (QR) code

which directs users to the website when scanned with a smartphone QR reader. The website functions as a two-way communications portal and highlights Malaysia's business events, products and services. The portal also offers quick access to information about venues, accommodation and incentive ideas, with the aim of making it easier for meeting planners to organise business events in the country.

Contact

Phang Wei Yin
Tel: (603) 2034-2090
Email: weiyin@myceb.com.my
www.myceb.com.my

Maxim's Genting

Resorts World Genting (RWG) has completely refurbished, upgraded and rebranded the Genting Hotel in the Genting Highlands Resort as Maxim's Genting. Under the new configuration, the property's 422 rooms have been categorised as premier (174), club suites (227), signature suites (seven) and penthouse suites (three). The remaining 11 executive suites are reserved for Maxim's Club members. Among the three penthouse suites is the Royal Suite, which covers an area of about 1,216m², and offers five bedrooms and its own outdoor garden area.

Contact

www.genting.com

Berjaya Langkawi Resort

Stage one of the Berjaya Langkawi Resort's room refurbishment programme, involving a total of 241 keys, will be completed by July this year. Superior and deluxe rooms are being upgraded into rainforest and seaview chalets respectively, while selected pairs of superior rooms are being merged into rainforest studios. Once the overhaul is completed, stage two of the refurbishment – involving the junior overwater chalets – will commence. The final stage of renovations will focus on the main buildings, reception area and restaurants.

Contact

www.berjayahotel.com

Johor Premium Outlets

Johor Premium Outlets (JPO), a premium shopping facility located in Kulaijaya in Johor, opened its doors for business in November last year. Claiming to be the first outlet shopping mall in South-east Asia, JPO will offer a wide selection of off-season branded goods including designer fashion wear, sportswear, children's clothes, bedroom linen, jewellery, shoes and fashion accessories. Shoppers will be offered discounts ranging from 25 to 65 per cent all year round.

Contact

www.genting.com

Brunei adds more shine

New waterfront hotel and upgrades keep kingdom shining, says N. Nithiyananthan



Kampong Ayer Cultural & Tourism Gallery



Times Hotel



The Brunei Hotel

ing a swimming pool, the hotel is located within the Times Square shopping mall. With a strong focus on F&B, the mall offers a supermarket and food court, restaurants and fast food outlets, as well as good shopping potential.

Brunei Hotel

Located in the city centre, within close proximity of the central business district, this property reopened in 2011 as a 62-room boutique hotel.

The Empire Hotel & Country Club

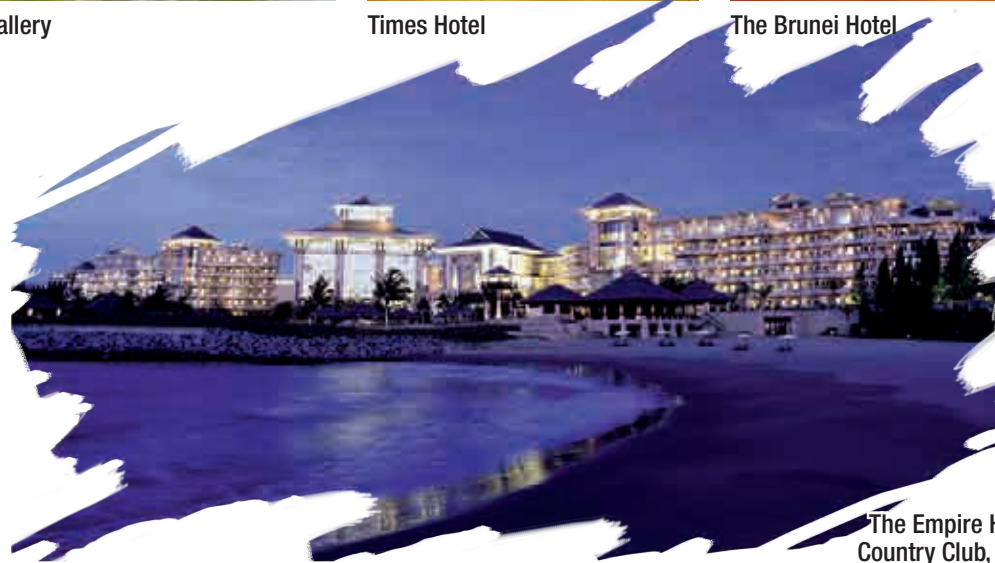
There is an ongoing room refurbishment project for 196 guestrooms in the main atrium building. The lifestyle café; Zest, was opened in August 2011. Other projects planned for include restaurant renovations and upgrades.

Waterfront

Opened in 2011, the Waterfront of Brunei's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, is a pedestrian promenade which offers sights of historical interest, and a variety of restaurants. As it overlooks the water village (Kampong Ayer), it is a popular place for a stroll in the city, especially in the evening.

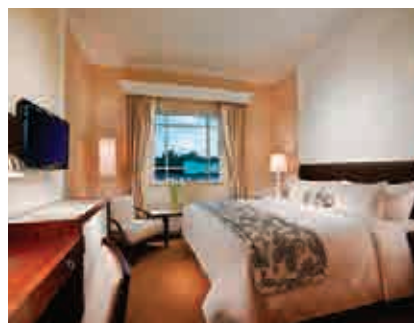
Times Hotel

Opened in 2011, this three-star hotel is located literally by the airport. With facilities includ-



The Empire Hotel & Country Club, Brunei

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Myanmar opens for trade

The industry needs to shape up as the country opens up. Reports by Rahul Khanna

My take

“Myanmar’s tourism industry is now at the point where it needs to become more professional to cater for the growing demand.”

Edwin Briels
General manager
Khiri Travel Myanmar

With most travel boycotts lifted, Myanmar’s tourism industry players are expecting visitor numbers to rise by some 30 per cent this year, following a similar increase in 2010-2011.

Exotissimo Travel Myanmar managing director, Su Su Tin, said: “I noticed some improvement after the general election in November 2010, the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the transfer of power to a new government in March last year.”

As a result, she said travellers from markets such as Scandinavia, Switzerland, the UK and US were showing interest in Myanmar, and tour operators in those countries were now selling packages to the country.

“Even our UK-based partner, which did not offer Myanmar before, started to include it with other Asian destinations last year.”

According to data from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, in the first eight months of 2011, the country recorded 221,190 arrivals, up 20.39 per cent over the same period in 2010. Of the total,



Positive political developments over the past year have opened new tourism markets for Myanmar, though more work needs to be done on tourism-related policies. While Asia will continue to supply the majority of visitors, the previously dormant Western markets are likely to grow, thanks to Myanmar’s improving international image.

some 66.92 per cent were Asian visitors, with Thailand as the largest market, followed by China, South Korea and Japan. Europe contributed 22.19 per cent of total arrivals between January and August 2011, with France as the largest contributor, followed by Germany and Italy.

Myanmar Marketing Committee secretary, Phyo Wai Yar Zar, said the country’s tourism

industry was “in good spirits” and expected arrival numbers to rise by “at least 20-25 per cent” for the financial year ending March 31, 2012.

“Provided that the political climate remains relatively stable, and based on the trend of increasing tourist arrivals, we are looking forward to having 350,000 to 375,000 tourists in 2012,” he said.

Phyo, who is also managing director of Yangon-based All Asia Exclusive Travel, said an increase in capacity on international and domestic air routes would support growth.

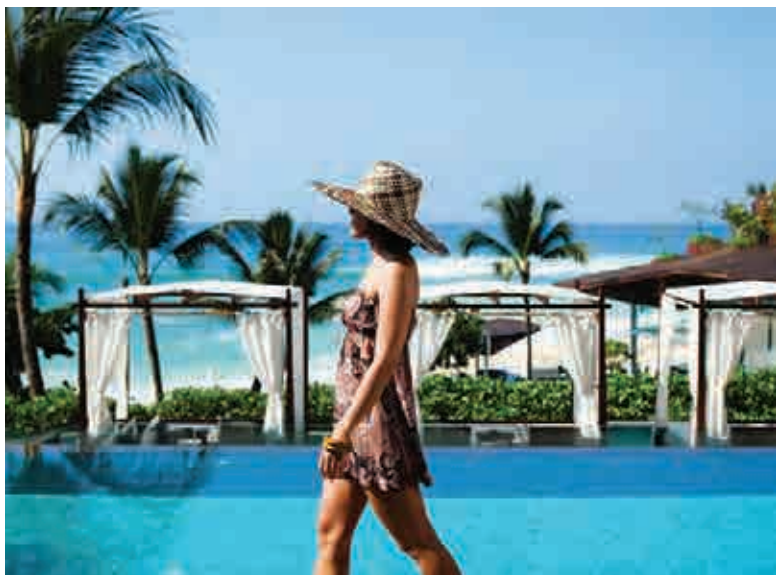
“We would like to see some European airlines operating directly to Yangon,” he said.

“To match the growth in air capacity, we will need more hotels and newer vehicles for transportation.”

Khiri Travel Myanmar general manager, Edwin Briels, said the country’s tourism players needed to be more professional in business dealings.

He said that among the many problems facing tour operators were double bookings, back-up bookings, fake bookings and hotels releasing rooms at the last minute.

Briels said that on a recent sales trip to the Netherlands, some operators lamented that Myanmar was a difficult destination to deal with, as they had to wait until the last minute to get rooms confirmed. “We should try to avoid developing that kind of reputation,” he said.



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Hotels | Foreign investment needed

Hosting the 27th South-east Asian (SEA) Games in 2013 has spurred a building boom that should see 50 new hotels open across the country.

The political and economic reforms launched in 2011 should provide a major long-term boost to tourism, while a further thawing of relations with the West should help boost visitor numbers from the UK, Scandinavia, the US and Australia.

Frank Janmaat, general manager and country director of KMA Hotels Group, said the shifts were most noticeable in Yangon. As well as an increasing number of tourists there was a huge influx in business travellers and representatives of foreign companies “who come to get a feel of the country”.

“With the current positive news in the foreign press about political changes and a possibility that sanctions will be at least partially lifted in the near future, every self-respecting multinational is preparing itself.”

However, Janmaat said there were “still too many laws in place, which are disruptive or not sufficiently clear” for Myanmar to welcome more foreign investment.



Chatrium Hotel, Yangon

According to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar has 691 licensed properties with more than 23,000 rooms. Of these, 22 properties were built using foreign investment, with the largest investments coming from Singapore, Thailand and Japan. Nine other hotels were built using government funds and the remaining 678 are privately owned.

The country has 11 hotel

zones: in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon, Mandalay, Bagan, Chaungtha, Ngwesaung, Taunggyi (Inle), Mawlamyine, Bago, Rakhine and the Golden Triangle.

These zones are being expanded to meet the anticipated surge in traveller demand during the SEA Games.

Industry players said the number of available hotel rooms would be insufficient to meet the strong demand.

Chatrium Hotel, Yangon assistant general manager, May Myat Mon Win, said rates would “definitely go up” because of the increased demand.

She was certain that the average daily rate and RevPAR would rise this year. She added: “I feel that the increase may not be lower than 25 per cent over 2011.”

The opening up of Myanmar’s economy should also herald significant increases in the number

of leisure and business travellers from the UK, Scandinavia, the US and Australia.

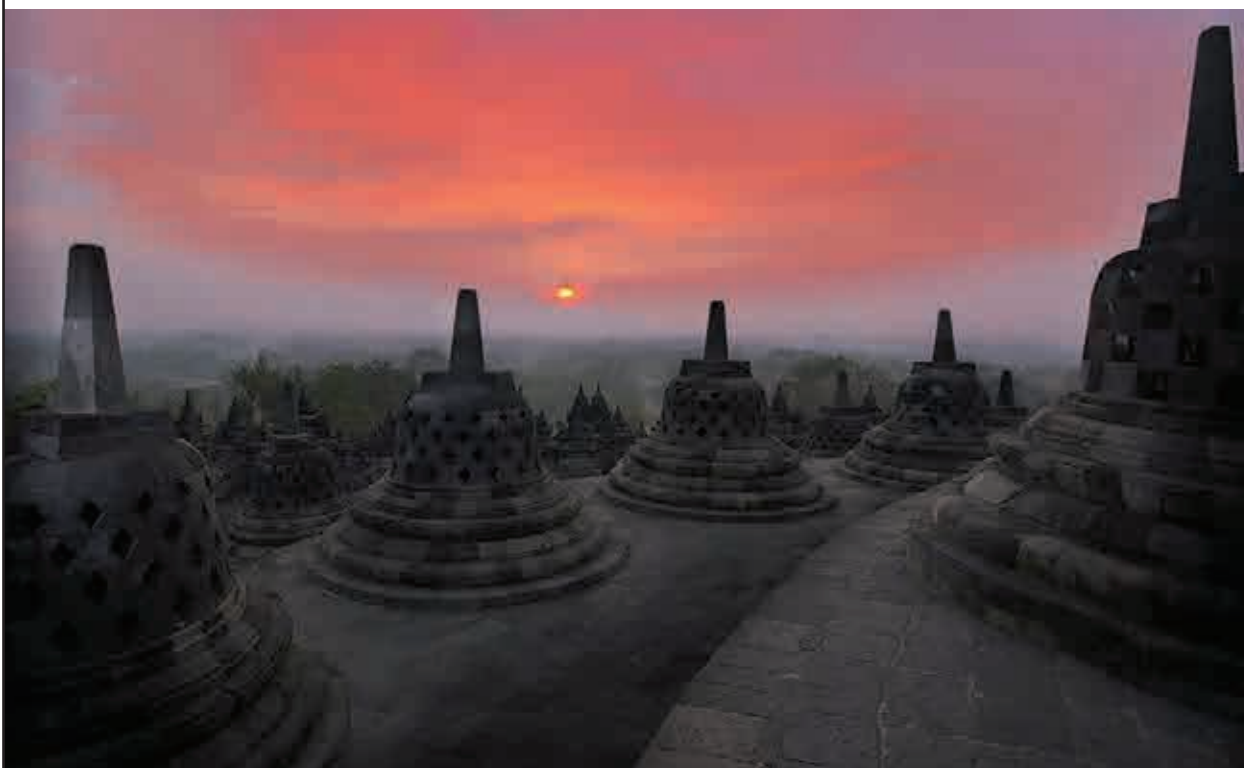
Major leisure destinations such as Bagan, Inle and Ngapali are expected to attract the higher-end leisure market while Yangon – positioned as the key commercial hub – is expected to attract corporate and meeting travellers.

Janmaat said: “Tourism has not been very important for our hotels in the past. Average occupancy levels and room rates were low. We see that this has changed tremendously over the last few months. FITs are paying top prices for the few rooms which are still available, especially in Yangon.”

He added: “Occupancies in Bagan, Inle and Mandalay are on the rise as well, and Yangon to a lesser degree.”

The 300-room Centrepont Towers Hotel, part of an integrated complex in downtown Yangon, was the only recent major opening. Janmaat said it appeared that local companies were stretched to the limit with their investments and Myanmar needed to attract foreign investment in the tourism industry as soon as possible.

TAILOR-MADE TOURS OF INDONESIA

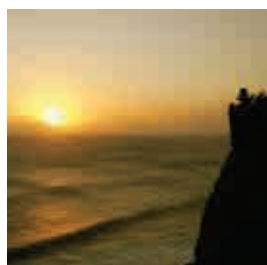
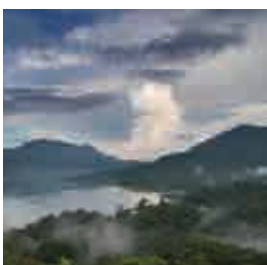


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Philippines has high hopes

Things are looking up with hopes that carriers will regain top FAA status and a long-awaited DoT campaign will get under way. Reports by **Marianne Carandang**



Courtesy of El Nido Resorts

2012 promises to be a banner year for the Philippines as it prepares to launch a new tourism brand and host the PATA Travel Mart in Manila in September. The timing could not be better, as Ninoy Aquino International Airport is finally going to be renovated, while airline and airport authorities hope to lift Philippines' carriers back to the top FAA category.

The industry has been waiting for the Department of Tourism's (DoT) promised tourism campaign since late 2010 – it is now due to be launched in early 2012.

In the meantime, leading tourism groups such as the Philippine Travel Agencies Association and The Philippine Tour Operators Association have supported efforts to re-establish the credibility of Philippine airlines in the US and Europe. Their top priority has been the campaign to reaccredit the airlines with the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), in the hope of bringing back the country's top rating.

An inspection trip from the

FAA to review safety and ground handling training qualifications in the Philippines was expected by December 2011.

If the FAA rating is moved back to the top category, the DoT expects that the EU ban on Philippine carriers would be lifted by the middle of 2012.

The EU ban had far-reaching consequences for DMCs targeting Europe, since European travel professionals refused to insure domestic flights in the Philippines. Given the country's geography, this is a major problem.

"We're concerned that in the long term European travel consultants will be discouraged because of safety concerns and

increased costs that have to be passed on to their clients," said Alex Stutely, CEO, Blue Horizons Travel and Tours.

Companies such as his and the high-end resorts that accompany the DoT at major international fairs are targeting the Middle East, India and Russia, which are not affected by these concerns.

Arjun Shroff, managing director of Shroff International Travel Care, said: "We would like to follow up on the DoT's plans for visas on arrival for Indian tour groups. Numbers from India are rising."

Huge local criticism followed by Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) being branded the "world's worst airport"

prompted authorities to fast-track renovation plans for the 30-year-old terminal, which will begin in January at a cost of P1 billion (US\$23.8 million).

Plans included improvements to arrival areas and lounges, and adding more parking and a wider range of shops and services.

Transport and Communication Secretary, Mar Roxas, has said that given NAIAs limited opportunities for expansion, his department will look into prioritising improvements to Clark Airport.

The current journey between Clark and Manila ranges from 60 to 90 minutes but a mono-rail is planned to link the airport and the city.

My take

"We'd like to see increased arrivals and marketing effort by the Philippines. Developing the right infrastructure is important in making this happen."

Emy C. Malate

Vice president for marketing, Image Travel & Tours Corp

NTO | Tourism brand to roll out soon

Things are looking up at the Department of Tourism, where newly-appointed Tourism (DoT) Secretary Ramon Jimenez took charge in September 2011, following the resignation of Alberto Lim.

As a veteran of the advertising industry, Jimenez's presence is expected to galvanize the country's tourism branding, which has not made progress since 2010. The country's new tourism slogan is expected to roll out in early 2012 after the department evaluates proposals from eight major agen-

cies. Lim's major legacy, the 2011-2016 National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP), details of which have not been fully disclosed, remains under review and will be presented to President Benigno Aquino III as previously intended.

Lim however disclosed that the NTDP had prioritised tarmac renovation and terminal expansion at Mactan International Airport in Cebu,



Bengzon: key markets

as well as the upgrading of airports in Bohol, Albay, Cagayan de Oro and Puerto Princesa into international status. The recently-renovated Caticlan Airport would also get new runway lights and night-time navigation systems that would allow more flights into Boracay.

Assistant Tourism Secretary for International Tourism Promotion, Benito Bengzon Jr, said: "We already know how we will spend our 2012

budget on travel fairs, fam tours and advertising. We will continue targeting our key markets – South Korea, the US, Japan and China – but we've revised our arrivals target to four million, which is currently higher than the NTDP target and that of our National Economic Development Authority (NEDA)."

Bengzon added that the DoT would intensify efforts in Taiwan, Hong Kong and India, from which arrivals surged to 32,551 visitors from January to September 2011, a growth of 57.74 per cent from

the same period in 2010. "Charter flights from Taipei to Kalibo have also boosted Taiwan arrivals," Bengzon added.

"Growth rates have been steady for all our markets except for Hong Kong," he said. To win back tourists, the DoT had taken Hong Kong travel consultants on tours of Manila-Cebu-Bohol and Manila-Cebu-Boracay.

Preparations were underway for PATA Travel Mart 2012, which would be in Manila in September at the SMX Convention Center.



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Hotels | Room boom across country

The Philippines is to add 10,524 rooms between 2011 and 2014, according to the Department of Tourism (DoT). Of these, 4,358 were expected to have opened in 2011, a banner year for Metro Manila, Cebu and Bohol.

An estimated 2,707 rooms were completed or near completion in 2011 in Metro Manila, boosting capacity by 20 per cent. Remington Hotel at the Resorts World Manila complex in Pasay opened in November with 712 rooms, while Acacia Hotel Manila, in the southern business district of Alabang, opened in August with 262 rooms.

Manila's hoteliers are adjusting rates for inflation and are waiting to see the effects of the economic slowdown abroad.

"We're expecting room rates to go up maybe five to 10 per cent in 2012," said Sofitel director sales and marketing, Chanelle Garvey. "Average occupancy has been good at 66 to 68 per cent."

Not taken into account in the DoT's figures are the thousands of rooms planned for Entertainment City, an 8km² integrated casino and resort in Manila Bay, near the SM Mall of Asia, over the next five years.

Cebu and Bohol are both expected to get about 550 new rooms by late 2011-2012. Cebu's growth is mainly downtown, catering to business and value-conscious travellers, with small to medium-sized hotel openings including Diamond Suites, Goldberry Suites, Solo Grande



Hotel and Harold's Hotel.

General manager of Waterfront Cebu City Hotel & Casino, Alfred Portenschlager, forecasted a 72 per cent occupancy rate for end-2011 at his property.

"We did not increase rates in 2011," he said. "This year, we're looking at a modest increase of about eight per cent. We feel the market situation has stabilised. We're building new rooms and focusing on the Russian, Indonesian and Singaporean markets."

Bohol, which had a relatively modest inventory, added a slew of luxury resorts. Panglao Bluewater Beach Resort opened last July with 48 suites and four villas, and will add 100 rooms in the next 18 months. The Bellevue Bohol is scheduled to open in summer with 158 rooms, while Henann Resort Alona Beach, which opened last March with 12 villas, will be adding 350 rooms

starting 2013. Eskaya Beach Resort & Spa will add 17 villas to its current 15, and build the 80-room Panglao Sands hotel.

Boracay is also gearing up for expansion. New casino licences have been granted to Fairways and Bluewater Newcoast Boracay, which was planning to construct 2,500 rooms, and the Crown Regency.

In Palawan, the El Nido Group planned to open Pangulasian Resort this month, while further resorts are in the works by El Nido, Bluewater Resorts, Henann Group and Banyan Tree.

Budget hotels are also expected to carry out a wave of expansions with local brands such as Gran Prix, Go Hotels, Island Getaways and Microtel.

Ayala Hotels is expected to add three boutique Kukun properties in Bonifacio Global City, Davao and Cagayan de Oro.

Destination by the numbers

78 Ninoy Aquino International Airport's Terminal 1, Terminal 2 – which handles Philippines Airlines – and Terminal 3, which serves low-cost carriers, accounted for 78 per cent of all flights entering the country. Mactan International Airport received 13 per cent of flights and Clark International Airport received four per cent.

5.76 DoT estimated that tourism enterprises and services contributed approximately 5.76 per cent to the country's GDP in 2010. The National Tourism Development Plan is targeting a contribution of 6.78 per cent to GDP from tourism by 2016.

27.9 Domestic travellers numbered approximately 27.9 million, according to DoT figures, outnumbering foreign arrivals by a ratio of 8:1. Meanwhile, there were 3.52 million international arrivals in 2010.

3,015 STR Global's August 2011 Global Construction Pipeline Report highlighted Manila as one of five markets with a "significant number of rooms under construction" at 3,015 keys. Other markets mentioned included: Shanghai, 10,838 rooms; Bangkok, 5,216; New Delhi, 5,088; and Beijing, 4,746. The September report observed that the Philippines saw room inventory growth of 26.8 per cent.

1 The one billion pesos (US\$23.8 million) allotted for the renovation of Ninoy Aquino International Airport's Terminal 1 will be divided into two separate funds. P450 million will be allocated for interior renovations of the arrival area and waiting lounges, while the remaining P550 million will go towards parking space and retail outlet expansions at the 30-year-old terminal.

2.88 Tourist arrivals into the Philippines from January to September 2011 reached 2.88 million, an increase of 12.02 per cent over the same period in 2010.

47.31 East Asia contributed 47.31 per cent of all arrivals into the Philippines from January to September 2011, growing 17.27 per cent over the previous year, with South Korea providing the most arrivals at 23.8 per cent of total inbound traffic.

2.15 Tourism arrivals into Palawan rose 2.15 times between 2007 and 2010 to 397,078 visitors. This was probably due to increased exposure following Puerto Princesa Underground River's participation in the New7Wonders of Nature competition, where it was named a provisional winner on November 11, 2011.

Airline | LCCs fly high as longhaul suffers

Airline and travel industry representatives have been frustrated by the lack of seats to the US and Europe, and are hoping that the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) pre-inspection visit that took place in December 2011 will lead to Philippine carriers recovering their top rating.

"We're confident that if we get that FAA rating back to where it was, a lift on the EU ban will follow," said DoT assistant secretary Benito Bengzon.

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines' plan to pull its Europe-Manila flights in April – the seventh airline to do so – is said to be in reaction to the three per cent tax levied on international carriers, adding to industry concerns.

"The low-cost carrier (LCC) market is growing faster than the legacy market," said Philippine Airlines (PAL) COO, Jaime Bautista. "Our sister company, Airphil Express, could well get a fair share of the market."

Indeed, the Philippines' LCC market was extremely active in 2011, with new services launched by all the players and the entrance of AirAsia Philippines, which was expected to deploy its first flights from Clark in December.

High demand and under-capacity continued to plague Manila, putting Clark International Airport under the spotlight.

Alongside AirAsia's entrance into the market, SEAir, which encountered difficulties tapping

its Tiger Airways partnership to launch additional domestic routes, added Clark-Hong Kong flights in March 2011, followed by Clark-Macau in May and Clark-Bangkok in October.

Zest Air started Kalibo-Chengdu and Manila-Jinjiang services in December 2011, and was looking at adding two hubs in the Middle East.

Cebu Pacific launched a Manila-Busan service in June 2011 and was planning to start a Manila-Hanoi route in March this year. It had also increased frequencies to Singapore, Brunei, Beijing, Ho Chi Minh and Kuala Lumpur from this month.

As for foreign airlines, Etihad Airways boosted its frequencies

from Manila to Abu Dhabi from 12 to 14 weekly starting last November, to cater to an expected increase in demand.

Turkish Airways was planning to launch an Istanbul-Manila flight, while Jet Airways was expected to launch Mumbai-Manila services. Fly Guam, a new full-service airline, was hoping to start Clark-Guam flights this year, subject to US approval.

Flag carrier PAL started 2011 promisingly, posting a P3.09 billion (US\$72.5 million) net profit for the fiscal year ending March, and moving forward with plans to spin off its catering, telesales and airport services divisions.

However, protests from employee labour groups in late Sep-

tember 2011 disrupted flights for several weeks.

PAL's reflecting plan included the addition of two Boeing 777-300s and four Airbus A320s.

Bautista said: "We are not looking into new destinations for now. We launched the Manila-New Delhi route, and we are studying growing demand in China... However, if the FAA rating improves, we would like to consider mounting additional flights to the US, to make use of our new Boeings."

Meanwhile, open-skies talks have yielded new flights and increased seat entitlements to Vietnam and Malaysia, while nothing emerged from talks with Indonesia and Sri Lanka.



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Mixed outlook for ASEAN

Near neighbours continue to be the first choice but local problems could cap any rises



Beach at Shangri-La Mactan Resort & Spa, Cebu, Philippines; Imperial City, Hue, Vietnam

Brunei

RBA cuts could hold back the outbound boom

Outbound travel from Brunei continued to grow in 2011 compared to 2010 and showed no signs of slowing down.

However, Royal Brunei Airlines' (RBA) decision to suspend flights to countries such as Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand could have an impact.

Bonasia Holiday Management Services executive director, Caroline Ang, said: "There may be difficulties in getting seats during peak travel seasons.

"We will have to wait and see," said Ang.

Ken Travel & Trading business development manager, Daryl Keasberry, did not believe the seat crunch would hit outbound travel.

He said: "There are more seats now, especially to London, as we do not have the Australian traffic

taking up allocations."

Meanwhile, Anthony Tours & Travel Agency tour supervisor, Mak Jia Wei, said: "People are going everywhere – just as long as they can travel."

Reporting better business than in 2010, Mak estimated growth in 2011 of approximately 10 per cent.

Ken Travel's Keasberry said: "Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and Bangkok are the ever-popular destinations."

Travel to Bangkok, however, had been affected by the recent flooding, he said.

While Ken Travel had experienced an increase in outbound travel in 2011 compared to 2010, Keasberry said it was due to a buoyant corporate market and not so much the leisure market.

Anthony Tours & Travel Agency's top outbound destina-

tions were China, South Korea and Taiwan. The disasters in Japan caused a blip in outbound figures for 2011 to the destination, benefiting ASEAN.

"Our customers stopped travelling to Japan, opting instead for Malaysia and Singapore," Mak said. "But as the situation has settled, travel is starting again to Japan and the (north Asia) region."

Both ASEAN NTOs and the trade needed to participate in Brunei-based travel fairs to drive more people to their destinations. "This is the best way of convincing people to travel," Mak said.

"More and more people are booking their tickets and hotels online. The only time they come and make bookings via travel experts is at travel fairs."

"Promotions, sales and travel fairs are the main drivers for

travel," Keasberry added.

Although Bonasia specialised in inbound travel, it also organised outbound charter flights once a year during the Chinese New Year season.

"This year we are doing seven charter flights – four to China and three to Taiwan. Last year we only did two charter flights," said Ang.

"Passengers to China have the option of travelling on to South Korea while those heading to Taiwan can go on to Japan," she added.

Ang attributed the increase in charter flights to not only increased demand for the destinations, but also demand for Brunei inbound from China and South Korea.

Keasberry added that the outlook for 2012 "seems to be okay".

– N. Nithiyananthan

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Thailand Flooding and a strong yen hit Thai travellers

The number of Thais travelling abroad was expected to fall by 10 per cent in September 2011 due to the flooding in the country's central provinces. The report for the last three months of 2011 and 2012 will depend on how quickly the floods recede.

According to Charoen Wangananont, president of the Thai Travel Agents Association (TTAA), an umbrella organisation for outbound travel experts, approximately four million Thais travelled overseas in the first eight to nine months of 2011.

TTAA expected about 5.8 million outbound travellers in 2011. However, this estimate was made before the deluge started affecting the livelihoods of Thais living in provinces along the Chao Phraya River.

Charoen said the strength of the Japanese yen over the Thai baht at press time was another reason for a possible decline in the number of outgoing Thais in the last three to four months of 2011.

"The expected number of outbound Thai travellers may fall short by 60,000 to 70,000 (in 2011), but the figure also depends on the overall flooding situation

in November and December," she said. At press time, it was too early to gauge 2011 figures due to the flooding, said Charoen.

According to figures from the Immigration Bureau, Royal Thai Police, some 1.36 million Thais travelled abroad in the January-March 2011 period, representing an eight per cent increase over the 1.25 million who travelled in the same period in 2010.

Of the total number of outbound Thai travellers in the first quarter of 2011, about 1.12 million visited East Asian destinations (up 8.09 per cent), a total of 93,013 went to Europe (up 14.40 per cent), approximately 67,000 visited the Middle East (up 4.08 per cent) and 32,474 went to Oceania (up 10.02 per cent).

Neighbouring ASEAN countries chalked 813,562 Thai travellers, up 11.57 per cent. The top five destinations were Malaysia, Laos, Singapore, Vietnam and Myanmar.

Newly-opened attractions in Singapore helped the city state record the highest growth in Thai travellers at 18.03 per cent to 88,014 tourists.

"Asian and ASEAN countries are the most popular destinations for Thai travellers due to

the shorter travelling distance and lower trip expenses when compared to longhaul destinations," Charoen added.

She said TTAA members found that outbound Thai travellers spent an average of four to five nights on an overseas trip, with an average expenditure per person per trip of 40,000 to 50,000 baht (US\$1,298 and US\$1,623).

Figures from the Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, showed that a total of 5,338,127 Thais travelled overseas in 2010, up 17.71 per cent from the 4,535,093 recorded in 2009.

The top five regions in 2010 were East Asia, Europe, Middle East, Oceania and South Asia.

Meanwhile, ASEAN recorded 3.29 million Thai travellers in 2010, with the top five destinations being Malaysia, Laos, Singapore, Vietnam and Myanmar.

In 2010, outbound Thai travellers spent an average 5.06 days, and their average spend per day per person was 4,497.43 baht, up from 4.98 days and 4,437.52 baht respectively in 2009.

Asia, and ASEAN, remained the most popular destinations for Thais. – **Sirima Eamtako**



Asian and ASEAN countries are the most popular destinations for Thai travellers due to the shorter travelling distance and lower trip expenses when compared to long-haul destinations.

Charoen Wangananont
President
Thai Travel Agents Association



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Myanmar Neighbours profit from rising demand for foreign travel

Myanmar's outbound tourism market is booming, especially to accessible shorthaul destinations such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Vietnam and China are also seeing rises following Myanmar Airways International's launch of direct flights.

Yangon-based Sun Far Travel and Tours sales and reservation manager, Hein Thant, said Myanmar's outbound tourism market had grown substantially in the past few years and looked set to grow further in the next two to three years.

The company is now offering medical tourism packages, all-inclusive deals and free-and-easy packages.

Hein said that 40 to 50 per cent of outbound travellers from Myanmar visit ASEAN countries.

"Thailand is a major destination for shopping, medical and leisure travel, with key cities being Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket," Hein added.

Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia are also popular.

Visa-on-arrival facilities and direct air routes to ASEAN member states are major factors in attracting travellers from Myanmar, according to travel experts.

However, certain limitations on outbound traffic from Myanmar still stand. Myanmar nationals are required to apply for visas to most destinations, even ASEAN member countries.

Myanmar also has limited international air access. It is directly linked to only five countries – Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia.

For other ASEAN destinations, Myanmar's outbound market uses Bangkok and Singapore as gateways but travellers have to shoulder the high airfares.

Overseas travel is likely to become easier in 2015 when Myanmar joins the ASEAN Economic Community, according to Phyo Wail Yar Zar, the secretary of the Myanmar Marketing Committee.

He said: "Myanmar travellers wanting to visit other ASEAN countries will not need to apply for visas from 2015. There should be no barriers between ASEAN countries, and that include barriers to travel."

Lynn Zaw Wai Mang, executive director of Unique Asia Travels and Tours, agreed that the outbound market was growing fast.

"Demand is growing by 35 per cent year-on-year. Even last year, demand was very high because of the favourable currency exchange rate."

Lynn noted that Myanmar nationals tended to prefer travelling

abroad, as the cost of domestic travel was "almost as expensive".

He added that many were travelling for business, as well as leisure.

Myanmar's leisure travellers, however, wanted attractions that were not readily available at home – theme parks, zoos and temples were important but top of the list was shopping.

Lynn said that ASEAN member countries needed to promote tourism. "Many countries come to Myanmar for other exhibitions but they need to promote their tourism attractions."

He hoped that Myanmar's authorities would open up outbound tour operation for the leisure market.

"I wish the ministry would legalise outbound tour operators. I also wish the ministry would organise local travel shows to promote both domestic and outbound tourism, as well as services such as sightseeing coaches and cruises."

"People should know about the quality of available services."

Lynn believed that more people would be interested to travel once they became aware of the facilities and services available to them. – **Rahul Khanna**



"Myanmar travellers wanting to visit other ASEAN countries will not need to apply for visas from 2015. There should be no barriers between ASEAN countries, and that includes barriers to travel."

Phyo Wail Yar Zar
Secretary

Myanmar Marketing Committee



Singapore Zoological Garden

Courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board



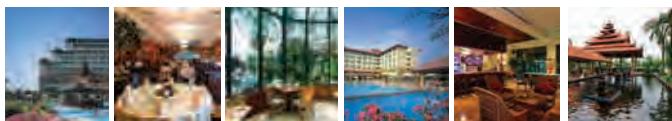
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Philippines Old staples still a major draw for short breaks

Frequent and highly-competitive low-cost carrier promotions to shorthaul destinations are fuelling the Philippines short-break market.

Although ASEAN outbound travel data for the Philippines is not available, the Department of Tourism estimates two million tourists travelled abroad in 2010 on short overseas trips.

FITs seeking alternatives usually pick Singapore.

Gene Hari Ong, managing director of Everyday Travel & Tours, said: "The number one attraction in Singapore is the Universal Studios theme park. The other reason for visiting Singapore is because it's the jump-off point for Star Cruises, which takes tourists to Thailand and Malaysia."

Ong said a three-day, two-night cruise was usually combined with one night pre- and

one night post-cruise hotel stays in Singapore. Among the top attractions were day tours featuring Universal Studios on Sentosa and the Jurong Bird Park.

However, Hong Kong is still most popular with Filipino travellers, as it is a familiar destination, noted Ong.

Travellers are mostly families, and their preferred activities include theme park visits and a mixture of luxury and bargain shopping.

Josefina Baena, general manager of New Era Travel & Tours, said: "Hong Kong is a major family vacation destination, especially for families with children, and it's not really expensive."

Baena said Disneyland and Ocean Park were must-visit attractions in Hong Kong.

Hotel rates are an important consideration for Filipino travellers. "People will go for cheaper, nice budget-friendly hotels, but not low-cost properties," said Ong.

One way that travel consultants try to lower costs for FITs and tour groups on Singapore-based cruises is by advising them to book early, at least 60 days in advance. "That way, they can book a US\$800, five-day, four-

night vacation that will include air tickets, hotel accommodation, two nights on a cruise and all transfers," Ong said.

Some travel professionals are looking beyond the staple destinations.

"Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong are saturated, so the next popular destination, and one which does not require Filipinos to apply for visas, is Vietnam. A lot more curious Filipinos are headed there," said Rina Calma Nakayama, assistant managing director at Stars Travel, who handles FITs and corporate travellers to Vietnam.

"Hong Kong, Thailand and Singapore are still the top destinations, and Macau is capturing an increasing share," said Rose Sandoval Galang, president of Ephesus Travel & Tours, whose business is 80 per cent outbound. Galang also predicted that interest in Vietnam would increase.

"We have been selling Vietnam packages like hotcakes since the middle of 2010, especially when combined with Cambodia," said Galang, whose clients take tour packages flying out of Clark or Manila airports using Philippine Airlines services. — **Marianne Carandang**

“Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong are saturated, so the next popular destination, and one which does not require Filipinos to apply for visas, is Vietnam. A lot more curious Filipinos are headed there.”

Rina Calma Nakayama
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ATF 2012 in full swing

The sellers-meet-buyers session was a hive of activity, discovers **Patrick Tan**



Eager sellers making the most of the 45-minute long sellers-meet-buyers session at the Novotel Manado Golf Resort and Convention Centre yesterday



Grand Lexis Port Dickson's Catherine Tan, Kasel Travel Solutions Philippines' Eric Papa and JLT Travel & Tours Philippines' Linda Tan



Go Vacation Thailand's Hermann Wegmueller and Christoph Mueller, and Movenpick Resort & Spa Koh Samui's Roland Svensson



Boulevard Hotel Mid Valley Kuala Lumpur's Aaron Tan and Cox and Kings (Singapore)'s Peter Yap



Berjaya Hotels & Resorts Malaysia's Ireen Chew and Holiday Bash International India's Sindi Lidder



Sala Resorts and Spas Thailand's Nunnapat Wongpipit, Swisotel Nai Lert Park Bangkok's Allen Howden and Swisotel Merchant Court Singapore's Connie Aw Yong



The Federal Kuala Lumpur's Jenny Aw and Pegasus Indonesia Tours & Travel's Jimmy Saputra



Hotel Istana Kuala Lumpur City Centre's Eugene Yeo, Meritus Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa Langkawi's Elaine Tan and Hard Rock Hotel Penang's Betty Lim



Holiday Inn Resort Phi Phi Island's Rung-Aroon Kumpalanuwat and JW Marriott Phuket's Chatchaya Glaiprayong



N.S. Travel & Tours Thailand's Chatchawan Soorangura and White Rose Hotel & Villas Indonesia's Rai Swadarma

Opening TRAVEX with a bang

Spirits run high among participants at the star-studded ceremony, hosted by Indonesia. By **Patrick Tan**



Welcoming ATF delegates with a colourful traditional performance



Indonesia's vice president Boediono (far right), with (from left) the governor of North Sulawesi Sinyo Harry Sarundajang, UNWTO secretary-general Taleb Rifai and minister of tourism and creative economy Mari Elka Pangestu



Nokia Belgium's Monique Petrus



The Pavilions, Bali's Il Soon Kang



Paradise Islands South Africa's Paul Coetzee



Japan Association of Travel Agents' Akihiko Hosaka, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy Indonesia's Nia Niscaya, Japan Association of Travel Agents' Tatsuro Nakamura and ASEAN-Japan Centre's Fuchigami Joukei



Federal Hotels International Malaysia's Jenny Aw and Ooi Lee Ping, Melia Kuala Lumpur's Brendan Wong, Melia Benoa's Sulistiowati and Gran Melia Hotel Jakarta's Inge Kohari



ASEAN Today's Henri Zix, Sunway Hotel Phnom Penh's Pheakdey Kong and Classis Travels & Tours India's Aditya Dhumma

Brunei Tourism's Sheikh Jamaluddin Sheikh Mohamed and Salinah Salleh



Chariot Travels Singapore's Ajambar Basnet and Worldwide Tour Services India's Ranju Anand



Pacific Hotel & Spa Cambodia's Kamsan Lek and Liem Sokunthea





Kamandalu Resort and Spa Indonesia's Darmawan Drajat and Orchidacea Resort Thailand's Jean-Pierre Rerat



Sunshine Borneo Tours' Eric Ignacio and Borneo Eco Tours' Agnes Lawrence



Vinpearl Vietnam's Ho My Dinh and Jurairat Povibool



Limes Consulting Poland's Magda Pilszak and Anthias Poland's Bernolak Agnieszka



Kasemkij Hotels Thailand's Siranee Rojanavanichakorn, Tanjung Bungah Beach Hotel Penang's Belinda Yeoh, Cosmopolis France's Guillaume de Vaudrey and Flamingo Hotel by the Beach, Malaysia's Sharene Ng

Melia Bali's Nengah Suarda, Airways Travel Germany's Jürgen Anding, Melia Benoa's Sulistiowati and Wild Card Adventures US' Scott Wild



Garuda Indonesia's Bima Pribadi, Novotel Manado Golf Resort & Convention Center's Fika Tiffani Koyong, Accor Asia Pacific-Indonesia's Alivia Gracianti and Pullman Jakarta's Mustika Retnowati



ASEANTA's Ikhwan Al-Rashid Abdul Rahman and Laservision Mega-Media's Shannon Brooks



DBA & Sons Travel & Tours UAE's T Prahlad, World Express Singapore's Jimmy Sim, Viking Travel & Media Vietnam's Eileen Tan, Seri Pacific Corporation Malaysia's Mohamad Halim Merican and Seri Pacific Hotel Kuala Lumpur's Eva Cheong



Mega Travel Bulgaria's Lidia Ivanova, Journeys to Asia Germany's Ajit Singh Sikand, Libra Bulgaria's Greta Veselinova and Euroholidays Bulgaria's Naalyan Gendzheva



ASEANTA's president Wiryanti Sukamdani (centre) and secretary-general Mohd Ilyas Zainol Abidin (far left) with the five ASEANTA award winners



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Issue

3

DISCOVERING PUTRAJAYA

MALAYSIA'S ADMINISTRATIVE CAPITAL HAS MUCH TO OFFER TOURISTS





A cruise on Putrajaya Lake is the quickest way to see the sights

Discovering Putrajaya

The quiet administrative capital has much to offer tourists

Putrajaya, Malaysia's administrative capital, is positioning itself as an international tourist destination, leveraging on many of its key attractions such as the 38 km lake promenade, more than ten parks and a whole calendar of events. The city, conceived in the late 1990s as an administrative capital to relieve the urban congestion choking up Malaysia's capital city, Kuala Lumpur, is moving forward to shed its quiet character for a more vibrant personality to bring in the tourists. Sprawling for close to 5,000 hectares, the meticulously-planned green city has enough going for it to warrant a day-trip or even an overnighter by tourists.

Attractions At the heart of the city is its main feature – the expansive 650 hectare manmade

Putrajaya Lake which acts as both scenic element and climate moderator. A cruise on the lake – via a traditional Malay wooden gondola or sailing aboard a fancy catamaran – is the quickest way to take in many of the sights. It's also been the venue for many international sports events such as waterskiing, sailing and dragon boat racing.

With almost 40% of the area being maintained as a green belt, one easily forgets that Putrajaya used to be agricultural land where rubber and palm oil were once cultivated. The 13 parks (and many pocket gardens) seen today were mostly re-planted, with many of the wildlife being re-introduced into their new habitats. The Wetlands Park is one such example combining human



With a new focus on tourism – and gearing up for a Visit Putrajaya Year in 2020 – Perbadanan Putrajaya, the agency charged with the responsibility to promote the city, has outlined its short and long-term plans to attract more tourists.

ingenuity and technology to create a manmade wildlife sanctuary that's even been attracting migratory birds, perfect for birders!

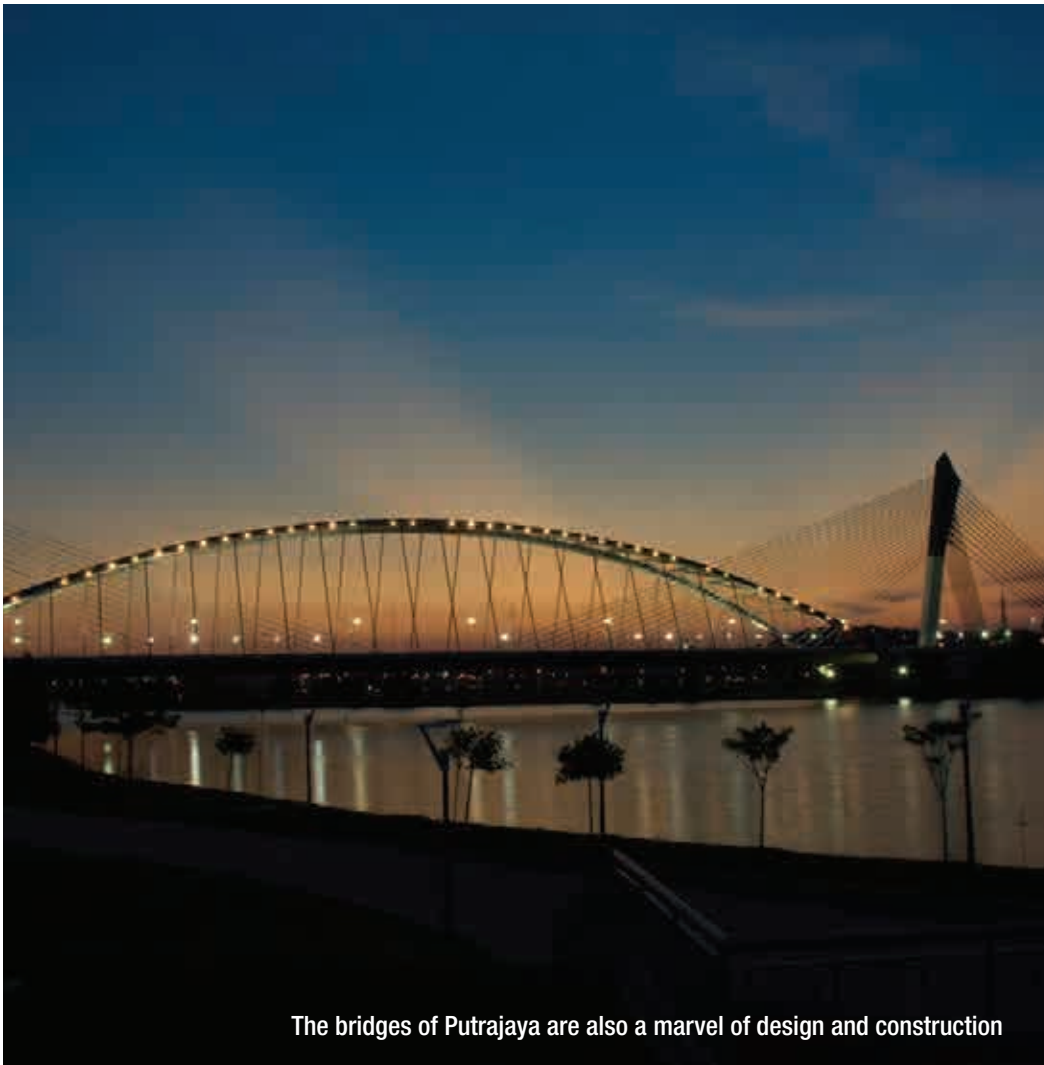
The Botanical Garden, the largest in Malaysia, is a leisure, educational and research centre for plant life. Its collection of more than 700 plant species collected from 90 tropical countries can be explored on foot, bicycle or tram. A new addition to the park is the Moroccan Pavilion, a replica of authentic Moroccan and Moorish architecture.

Seri Perdana, the official residence of Malaysia's Prime Minister, offers a glimpse of the unlikely marriage between Moghul and French design using mostly local wood and Langkawi marble in its architecture. Guided tours

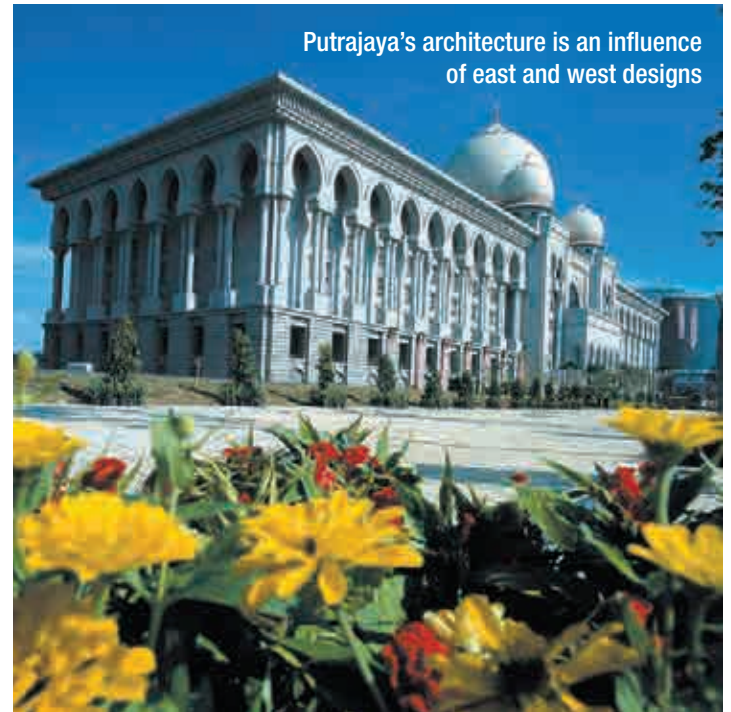
of the banquet halls and reception rooms where official guests are received are available daily (except Fridays).

Besides the many impressive office buildings (many of which revolutionized green building technology in the country) along the main Perdana Boulevard, the eight bridges of Putrajaya are also a marvel of design and construction.

Putrajaya runs a Best of Putrajaya tour twice a day on weekends at 11 am and 2:30 pm – a 2-hour guided sightseeing bus tour to 14 Putrajaya attractions including the Putrajaya mosque, several bridges, parks and the Prime Minister's office.



The bridges of Putrajaya are also a marvel of design and construction



Putrajaya's architecture is an influence of east and west designs



The Putrajaya International Convention Centre

Hotels

Within Putrajaya are two 5-star hotels, the Shangri-La with 118 guestrooms and the Pullman Putrajaya Lakeside with 283 guestrooms. Both have spa and meeting facilities. Other hotels within a 20-minute drive of Putrajaya are Cyberview Resort and Spa (74 rooms), Marriott Putrajaya (453 rooms), Equatorial Hotel (252 rooms with golf facility), Palm Garden Hotel (151 rooms with golf facility), Palace of the Golden Horses (480 rooms with golf facility) and Mines Wellness Hotel (175 rooms with golf facility).

Accessibility

The Maju Expressway links the Kuala Lumpur International Airport and Kuala Lumpur in a breezy 30-minute drive, with exits to Putrajaya, Cyberjaya and Bangsar, along the way. Alternatively, there is the KLIA Express Rail Link – a high speed train

– that plies the Kuala Lumpur-Putrajaya-KLIA route every half hour.

With business tourism being one of Malaysia's tourism focus, Putrajaya is serving this special market with the Putrajaya International Convention Centre, a dedicated convention venue.

With business tourism being one of Malaysia's tourism focus, Putrajaya is serving this special market with the Putrajaya International Convention Centre, a dedicated convention venue. From its perch atop a small hill, PICC offers sweeping views of the Putrajaya Lake and the city. Its Plenary Hall seats up to 3,000 people with a podium stage; Heads of State Hall accommodates circular

seating arrangement for 180 people; Perdana Hall seats 3,000 diners at a time and has its own kitchen. Other facilities include interpreter rooms, meeting rooms for 10 to 100 persons, private lounges and public galleries.

Notable events

Thanks to well-planned facilities and infrastructure in the city – ample parking lots, open space for outdoor activities, water-sports facilities, wide boulevards for parades – Putrajaya continues to fill up its calendar of events annually. This year's diary includes the 4th Putrajaya International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta (15-18 March), Flower and Garden Festival / FLORIA (30 June – 8 July), IWWF Asian Waterski & Wakeboard Championship (Oct) and the Malaysia International Dragon Boat Festival (Oct).

Future plans

With a new focus on tourism – and gearing up for a Visit Putrajaya Year in 2020 – Perbadanan Putrajaya, the agency charged with the responsibility to promote the city, has outlined its short and long-term plans to attract more tourists. In the works are bicycle tours and water taxis for tourists, a project to revitalise the main boulevard with tourism-related retail offerings, more al-fresco dining to leverage on the scenic lakeside promenade, new commercial and shopping areas, and plans for a budget hotel.

Putrajaya may be small in size at only 49 km square (compared to Kuala Lumpur's 243 km square), but it certainly packs in

leisure, commerce, and administrative functions in one small and attractive package. For more details, visit www.ppj.gov.my.

Besides the many impressive office buildings (many of which revolutionised green building technology in the country) along the main Perdana Boulevard, the eight bridges of Putrajaya are also a marvel of design and construction.

MALAYSIA: Major Events & Festivals 2012



JANUARY

Royal Langkawi International Regatta
9-14 January
Langkawi, Kedah

FEBRUARY

Thaipusam
7 February
Batu Caves, Selangor

Pasir Gudang International Kites Festival
14-19 February
Pasir Gudang, Johor

National Craft Day
22 February – 5 March
Kuala Lumpur Craft Complex

MARCH

Raptor Watch
10-11 March
Tanjung Tuan, Negeri Sembilan

Petronas F1 Malaysia Grand Prix
23-25 March
Sepang International Circuit, Selangor

1Malaysia GP Sale
10 March - 15 April
Throughout Malaysia

APRIL

Malaysia International Shoe Festival
6-8 April
Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur

MAY

Sabah Fest
5-6 May
Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

Colours of 1Malaysia
26 May
Merdeka Square, Kuala Lumpur

Borneo Jazz Festival
10-12 May
Miri, Sarawak

JUNE

Gawai Dayak Open House Celebration
9 June
Sarawak

Fraser's Hill International Bird Race
23-24 June
Fraser's Hill, Pahang

Putrajaya FLORIA
30 June-8 July
Putrajaya

1Malaysia Mega Sale Carnival
15 Jun-2 September
Throughout Malaysia

JULY

1Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourism Festival
2 July-30 September
Throughout Malaysia

Anniversary of UNESCO World Heritage City Celebration
7 July
Banda Hilir Melaka

Rainforest World Music Festival
13 – 15 July
Sarawak Cultural Village, Kuching, Sarawak

Port Dickson International Triathlon
20-22 July
Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan

AUGUST

Malaysia Water Festival (Fishing Carnival)
24-26 August
Kuala Rompin, Pahang

Malaysia National Day
31 August
Kuala Lumpur

SEPTEMBER

Lantern Festival
29 September
Central Market, Kuala Lumpur

Textile Craft Promotion
27 September-8 October
Kuala Lumpur Craft Complex, Kuala Lumpur

OCTOBER

Fabulous Food 1Malaysia -Malaysia International Gourmet Festival
1-31 October
Throughout Malaysia

Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix
19-21 October
Sepang International Circuit, Selangor

Mount Kinabalu International Climbathon
20-21 October
Kundasang, Ranau, Sabah

Malaysia Art Expo
October
MATRADE, Kuala Lumpur

NOVEMBER

Fabulous Food 1Malaysia – ASEAN Food Heritage Trail
1-30 November
Throughout Malaysia

1Malaysia Year-End-Sale (M-YES)
10 November-1 January 2013
Throughout Malaysia

Monsoon Cup
November
Pulau Duyong, Terengganu

DECEMBER

Fabulous Food 1Malaysia -Street Food and Restaurant Festival
1-31 December
Throughout Malaysia

Cuti-cuti 1Malaysia Dance Tourism Carnival
1 December
Kuala Lumpur

Note: The information here is correct at the time of printing. For more details, visit www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my