



Emergence of new ASEAN airlines

Buyers hopeful additional options will boost business

By Mimi Hudoyo, S Puvaneswary, and Paige Lee Pei Qi

Following the announcement of Air KBZ, sister airline of Myanmar Airlines International, launching flights between Yangon and Chiang Mai, brand new APEX Airlines is launching services between Nay Pyi Taw, Dawei and Myeik in the south, and between Yangon and Sittwe in the west.

In Vietnam, three-year-old VietJet has doubled its commercial fleet and operates 28 domestic and international routes to Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, Taiwan, and Cambodia.

Last November VietJet introduced a new route connecting Hanoi and Siem Reap and has announced plans to launch flights connecting Russia's Vladivostok with Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Danang, Hue and Phu Quoc last month.

In Indonesia, Xpress Air launched twice weekly, direct services between Jakarta and Johor Bahru, in December 2014, complementing Malaysia Airlines flights between Jakarta and Johor Bahru via Kuala Lumpur.

Meanwhile, AirAsia last July

opened new routes for Johor Bahru with four-weekly direct flights between Johor Bahru and Ho Chi Minh City, and three-weekly direct flights between Johor Bahru and Lombok.

Buyers welcomed the developments, saying they will help to open up the region and create new products.



Trivedi: Wants to combine countries

Elgin Agrigento, managing director, Itrarep.com Indonesia, said: "There're still some major cities not connected."

"In 2013, Vietnam Airlines opened direct services between Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta and it immediately boosted traffic between the two countries," he noted.

"Most recently, Garuda Indonesia signed a codeshare agreement with Myanmar Airlines to connect Jakarta and Yangon. However, there are no direct flights from Cambodia and Laos to Indonesia, or from several countries to the Philippines.

Monika Tigges, Product Manager Asia and Arabica, Explorer Fernreisen Germany, said: "With better connectivity, we can be more creative."

Shirish Trivedi, president,

Travel Leaders US, said: We want to combine countries, instead of staying 10 days in one country like Thailand. We want to recommend Cambodia and Myanmar, but for example if you are in Chiang Mai, you need to return to Bangkok to connect to Yangon."

Komsan Suwannarat, operations and product manager, Thailand-based Smart Travel, which has been packaging Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam into one itinerary since last year for high-end travellers from the US and UK, said the increased flight connectivity will provide better options and costings for its 20-day itineraries.

Nepal-based Arjun Sharma, managing director, Shiva Travels, explained that with the lack of direct connection into Indonesia, it has to be packaged with Malaysia.

"There is very good interest in Bali especially because it is a famous beach destination, and the Nepalese really enjoy seaside locations."

However, Andy Carroll, Exotic Voyages global head of sales and marketing based in Vietnam, cautioned that with new airlines, or domestic airlines going regional, there are always concerns about reliability and quality.



Team Philippines says hello and welcoming all to ATF 2016, to be held in Manila.

Philippines readies to play ATF host next year

By Hannah Koh

GIVEN that 99.2 per cent of total foreign arrivals last year travelled to the Philippines by plane, airlines and infrastructure development are therefore a priority to the destination, said Benito Benzon, undersecretary of tourism development, Department of Tourism.

Benzon was speaking at a media conference yesterday at ATF 2015, where the Philippines revealed further plans to boost the country's infrastructure and promotion efforts in the run-up to hosting the next ATF in Manila.

Tourism secretary of the Philippines, Ramon Jimenez, told the *Daily* the refurbishment of Ninoy Aquino International Airport's Terminal 1 will be completed by 2015 and Terminal 3 has begun full operations. An airport skyway connecting Terminal 1 to the new district Entertainment City, where ATF 2016 will be held, will also be completed this year.

Benzon also announced that

airport upgrading in destinations like Kalibo and Palawan are expected to finish in the next 12 to 24 months to offer travellers "seamless connectivity".

The country is also drilling down on niches such as English as a Second Language, which sees many South Koreans coming to study English, besides cruising, medical tourism, and diving.

On the promotions front, the Philippines is now being site-specific. "Our 'power branding' phase reached fairly high levels of awareness for the Philippines, and it's now time to push for awareness for specific areas," said Benzon, adding that ads now feature destinations like Camisur or Boracay.

Another focus is the MICE market, which Jimenez said is an "extension of the *It's more fun in the Philippines* campaign". The *Fun Works* campaign is already live on media and will support the Philippines' aim to boost this segment with ATF 2016.



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Snapshots

All systems go at Travex By Eugene Tang



Royal Brunei Airlines' Nurul Suzanee Abdullah



Dorsett Grand Subang's Gilbert Chai, Silka Hotels Malaysia's Jacqueline Pensyl, and Dorsett Hospitality International Malaysia's David Teoh



Park Hotel Alexandra Singapore's Rachel Ng, Park Hotel Group Singapore's Anne Tan, Park Hotel Clarke Quay Singapore's Serrin Sim, and Grand Park City Hall Singapore's Stanley Ho



The Lake Garden Nay Pyi Taw's Khaing Moe Htet, Novotel Phuket Resort's Janpen Dechapan, Grand Mercure Phuket Patong's Kritchaya Utsa, The Lake Garden Nay Pyi Taw's David Daguise, Novotel Manila Araneta Center's Joy De Mesa, Accor Thailand's Kitpun Jirawatcharadet and Sophia 'Khendy' Altamirano, and Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel Thailand's Poowanai Jiravichada



Santika Dyandra Hotel & Convention Medan's Cita Dewantoro and Santika Indonesia's Guido Andriano

After dark action in Nay Pyi Taw

Tuesday's Philippines Night at the Thingaha Hotel followed by the Late Night Function

organised by Kempinski Hotel Nay Pyi Taw gave buyers, sellers, and the media plenty of opportunity to network, and enjoy a rocking good time at the parties.



Discover Holidays Asia Singapore's Rodney Yew, TTG Asia Media's Michael Chow, and Kempinski Hotel Nay Pyi Taw's Franck Droin; live entertainment; selfie aficionados



Tourism Department Philippines' Ramon Jimenez; TTG Asia Media's Darren Ng and Tourism Promotion Board Philippines' Domingo Ramon Enerio III; excited revellers



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News/Snapshots

A vibrant marketplace By Eugene Tang



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HOTEL
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Thailand slowly gets back on its feet

By Greg Lowe

THAILAND'S tourism industry is recovering from last year's political crisis, though the rate of growth is slow and external factors such as the collapse of the rouble are causing additional problems for resort destinations like Phuket.

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the country received 24.8 million visitors last year, down 6.7 per cent from 2013. The NTO has set this year's target at 28 million.

Tourism and sports minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul told the *Daily*: "We are recovering, although there is not a big increase (in arrivals from the same period last year). It started picking up over the last three months. Another good sign is that the spending per head is increasing."

While authorities say they are targeting quality tourists, mass markets such as China and Russia are important with the downturn in arrivals from the latter, adding to the local industry's woes. This is also leading both the ministry and the NTO to focus on building business from high-spending source markets such as Europe.

"Russia is still dropping, so we are

targeting other European markets," said Kobkarn. "The quality from Europe is very good; they spend more and stay longer. We're seeing an increase in intra-ASEAN (travellers) and we are developing the 'Weekend Destination' to attract people (from the region) to come to Thailand for a short break. We have everything they need here: medical, wellness, golf, food, and shopping."

Travel companies from Thailand too, say that business is starting to improve. Patricia Weismantel, product manager, Spice Roads, said: "Things are getting better from last year. We are lucky as our clients tend to be more adventurous and are less likely to be put off by the news, but it has been slow."

Netnapa Tadakittikul, senior sales manager Asia-Pacific, Outrigger Resorts, said while the Thai market has started to recover, Phuket in particular was hit hard by the drop in visitors from Russia.

"The beginning of Q4 was starting to look good, but then we had the rouble crisis," she said. "Russia makes up about 40 per cent of our market in Phuket. Q1 is looking okay though. The pace is slow but it is picking up and bookings for May and June are looking good."

SOFITEL BALI NUSA DUA: THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

One of the biggest trends in travel in recent years has been a surge in experiential travel, where people are wanting more from their hotel than just a place to stay. Now they want a place that can offer them wellness, experiences and a point of differentiation. A growing number of travellers also want a hotel that can be a complete destination in itself. In an increasingly busy world there is a strong demand for a hotel where guests can arrive and immerse themselves in the local culture and leave refreshed and rejuvenated without having to travel too far.

Sofitel Bali Nusa Dua is a great example of this kind of 'destination' hotel and features extensive leisure facilities including a luxurious So Spa with traditional beauty treatments and a separate Vietura Cosme-di-spa which offers more intensive (but non surgical) treatments for anti-aging and slimming.

The resort also offers an excellent kids club, spectacular swimming pools, a wedding chapel on its own private stretch of beach and the brand new Nikki Beach Bali, with Sofitel guests enjoying direct access to this exclusive lifestyle venue with its all-white signature theme, plush sunbeds, freeform pool and swim-up bar plus regular themed parties that bring together the worlds of music, film, art and gastronomy.

By joining with world-famous names like Nikki Beach and Vietura, Sofitel Bali Nusa Dua offers its guests a complete holiday experience without having to leave the resort. This is a trend that is likely to continue to grow in coming years.



Sofitel Bali Nusa Dua Beach Resort

MYANMAR ON THE MIND

While there has been a recent flood of new accommodation into Myanmar, Accor was the first international hotel group to announce its re-entry into the country, with the opening of the Lake Garden Nay Pyi Taw MGallery Collection, an upscale boutique hotel which welcomed world leaders during an ASEAN meeting in August last year.

The hotel is set in a beautiful landscaped garden overlooking a tranquil lake and has just 165 rooms with strong references to Myanmar's rich culture throughout. The hotel's interior is full of beautiful artworks that provide a true sense of place, such as a gigantic alms-like bowl in the lobby, Burmese script adorning the walls, and architectural arched doorways. The Presidential Suites

and Executive Suites are reminiscent of art galleries and temples, with opulent teak furniture and décor.

To indulge discerning travellers with top gastronomic experiences, The Lake Garden offers several dining options: The Grand Bell which offers all-day dining and a diverse choice of cuisines, from local Myanmar dishes to those inspired by neighbouring countries. The Oak Room is an impressive wine cellar and cigar room, while Primo Italian restaurant offers exquisite Western cuisine in an atmospheric setting.

In addition, the hotel boasts some of the city's best conference facilities with capacity for 250 delegates, six meeting rooms and two state-of-the-art boardrooms. It is also great for leisure travellers

thanks to its M Spa which offers massage therapies that will rejuvenate and refresh both the body and mind

Accor followed this opening with the launch of the brand new Novotel Inle Lake Myat Min. It features 120 junior suites and lake villas, as well as two presidential villas.

There are several dining options including the Terrace Restaurant which serves a variety of Asian and international specialties, while the Sunset restaurant offers an a la carte menu with a walk-in wine cellar and the Pool Bar offers more casual dining. Leisure facilities include a fitness centre and spa.

"Inle Lake is a unique destination in Myanmar that travellers should not miss," said the Novo-

tel's General Manager Alain Miquel. "It's a natural sanctuary in a popular eco-tourism destination and the Novotel recognises the importance of biodiversity and unique natural resources.

"We have integrated Accor's Planet 21 sustainability program into the resort's operational procedures and use one of the most sophisticated water treatment systems in the country."

Other Accor hotels in development include the Pullman Yangon Myat Min which is an upscale hotel designed with a modern, contemporary style, which is set to open later this year. It will boast 300 rooms, two restaurants and bars, four banquet and meeting rooms, a fitness centre, swimming pool and spa facilities. The hotel is located on the river bank, mid-

way between the city and Yangon International Airport and not far from Inya Lake.

This year will also see the launch of the Novotel Yangon Max with over 360 rooms, three restaurants including a rooftop French restaurant, a bar, a 1000 sqm banquet room, eight meeting rooms, a pool and wellness centre. The hotel will be within walking distance of Shwedagon Pagoda, Inya Lake and Junction Square Shopping Centre.

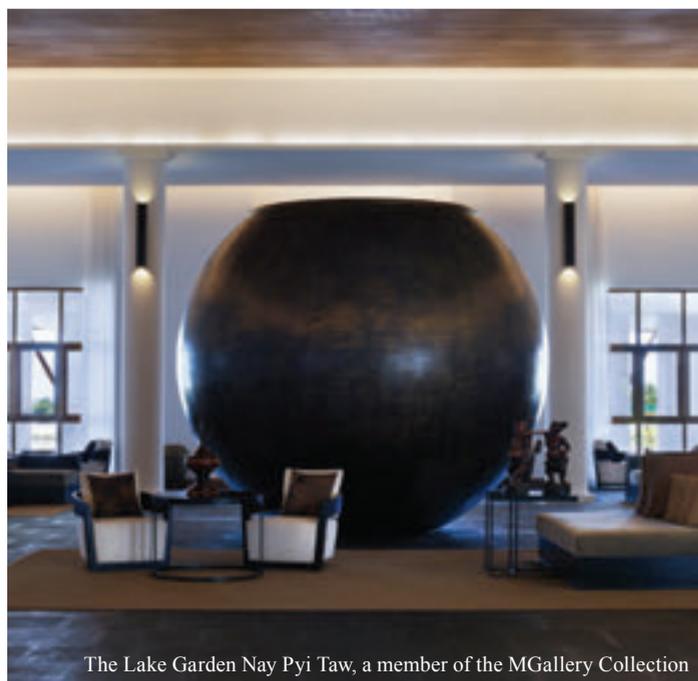
The Novotel Mandalay Mingalar, slated for a 2016 opening, will have 280 rooms, two restaurants and two bars, four meeting rooms, a pool and a wellness centre, situated in a prime location near Maha Muni Pagoda and Mandalay Palace.

Opening near the Pullman in 2017 will be The Sebel Yangon Myat Min, a premium serviced apartment-style hotel with 100 rooms. The hotel will have a restaurant, bar, two meeting rooms, a pool and fitness centre and will be the first development in Asia under The Sebel name, which is well established as a premium apartment brand in Australia.

"The future looks very bright for tourism in Myanmar and Accor is proud to offer international-standard hospitality in the country with these outstanding new hotels," said Patrick Basset, Chief Operating Officer for Accor Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines.



The Lake Garden Nay Pyi Taw, a member of the MGallery Collection



The Lake Garden Nay Pyi Taw, a member of the MGallery Collection

Host city: Nay Pyi Taw



A gilded capital

While the Burmese capital of Nay Pyi Taw dates back to only a decade, the city has seen a steady injection of attractions, hotels, restaurants and sightseeing options in the last few years. [Sid Dhartha](#) checks out the must-visit spots for visitors to the city

Where to eat?

1 Café Flight

This dining spot in front of the Sky Palace Hotel gets a lot of attention because of its setting – a salvaged plane where guests can sit and enjoy drinks. The aircraft turned café bar serves draught Tiger beer, coffee, noodles, pasta and pizza, with a main restaurant located just behind. It makes a fun spot for groups in the evening but the place is usually over-booked, so reservations are highly recommended.

Address: 3 Yaza Thingaha Road, Hotel Zone

Tel: (95) 9-4934-1495

Email: fbm@skypalace.asia

Website: www.skypalace.asia

2 The Bell Bistro

Nestled within The Lake Garden Hotel Nay Pyi Taw, this all-day dining restaurant features a selection of international cuisine mixed with local flavours in a contemporary yet casual ambiance.

Address: National Guest House Dekkhina Thiri Road, East Nay Pyi Taw

Tel: (95) 67-810-5059

Website: www.thelakegarden.com

3 Shwe Si Daw

A traditional Burmese restaurant located near the Hotel Zone and Myanmar International Convention Center, Shwe Si Daw offers various regional dishes, salads and snacks. It has six bungalows that allow private dining for groups.

Address: Pan Laung 2 Street, Kwar Nyo Main Road, Shwe Kyar Pin Block,

Zabuthiri Township

4 Siam Lotus Restaurant

One of the top dining spots for Thai cuisine, this restaurant is situated atop a hill with outdoor seating in a small garden. It offers a variety of Thai appetisers, curries, soup, noodle, grill and salad dishes. Open from 10.00 to 23.00, it is near the Gem Museum and about five minutes' drive from the Hotels Zone.

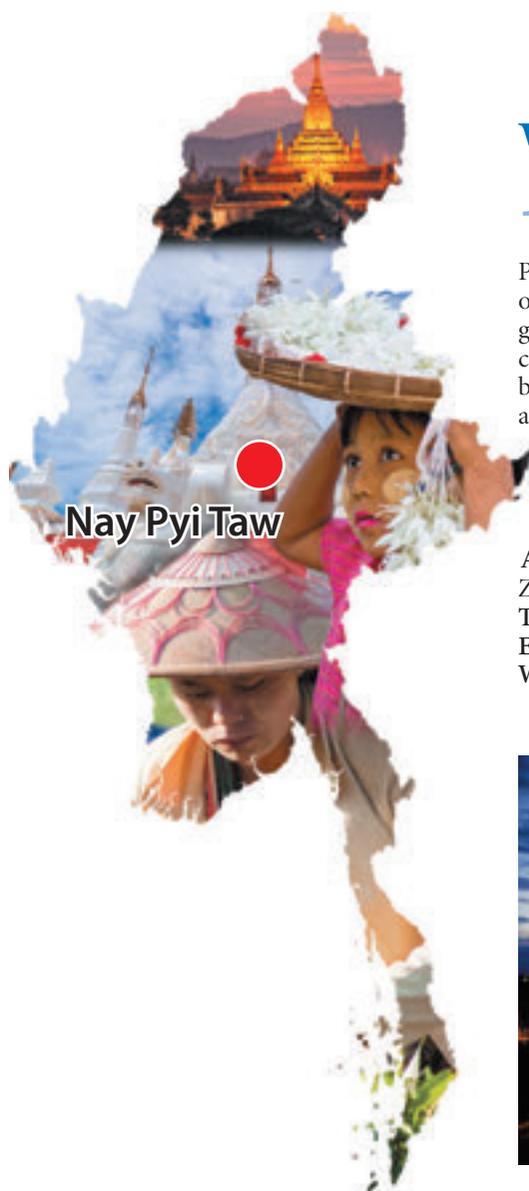
Address: 11 Tha Pyay Gone Restaurant Hill, Zabuthiri Township

Tel: (95) 67-432-337

Website: www.facebook.com/SiamLotus

5 Tai Kitchen

Set beside a lake in Tungapuri Hotel, Tai Kitchen specialises in Eastern Shan and Thai cuisines. Its signature dishes in-



Nay Pyi Taw

clude lemon chicken, morning glory with oyster sauce and grilled fish or prawns. Do let the staff know in advance if you wish to tone down the spiciness.

Address: 9/10 Yarza Thingaha Road, Dekhina Thiri, Hotel Zone

Tel: (95) 67-422-282

Email: taikitchen@tungapurihotel.com

Website: www.tungapurihotel.com

What to do?

1 National Herbal Park

Part of the government's efforts to protect and preserve indigenous herbs from extinction and to keep alive the country's traditional medicine knowledge, the 81ha Park showcases plants having medicinal applications from all over Myanmar. Over 20,000 herbal and medicinal plants, representing over 700 species from the various states and divisions of Myanmar, are grown in the park. Entry is free.

2 Zoological Garden and Safari Park

Spread across 430ha of land in Nay Pyi Taw, this biggest zoo in Myanmar features hundreds of exotic animals from different parts of the world, among them rare wildlife species such as white tigers. Visitors can view the different zones – Asian Safari, African Safari and Australian Safari – on buggies.

3 Myoma Market

Home to some 250 shops and 400 greengrocer stalls, this commercial centre is one of the capital's best spots to observe local lifestyles. Offering fresh produce, garments, food and snacks, the market comes alive each evening when locals visit in search of food after office hours. Visitors can also find *thanaka* (a yellowish face powder made from ground bark) and traditional *longyi* cloth.

4 Royal Myanmar Golf Course

Positioned between the airport and the city centre along the main highway, Yarza Thingaha Road, Royal Myanmar Golf Course currently boast 18 holes. The complex is complemented by a club, restaurant, bar, a golf shop and an academy with training and teaching facilities.

5 Ngalaik Lake Gardens

Ngalaik Lake Gardens is a small water park situated along the Ngalaik Dam, near Kyweshin Village on Ngalaik Lake. Situated about 11km away from the city centre, facilities at this lush man-made spot include water slides and resorts.

What to see?

1 Parliament Building

Forming a prominent landmark in the capital city is the impressive Parliament Building, built on a 324ha complex in Zabuthiri Township, with an 11-lane highway leading up to it. The vast complex is home to 31 buildings, including the imposing 100-room presidential palace as well as the city hall building featuring elaborate colonnades capped by layered roofs typical of Myanmar architecture.

2 Uppatasanti Pagoda

Also known as the Peace Pagoda, this prominent landmark in Nay Pyi Taw is a replica of Yangon's Shwedagon Pagoda and stands at 100m high. The glided pagoda houses a Buddha tooth relic from China, plus four jade Buddha images in a hollow cave; a 33m-high flagpole; a gar-

den with Bo trees and images of the 28 Buddhas, among other religious edifices.

3 Gem Museum

Located in Zabuthiri Township, this government-run hall houses many precious jewels of Myanmar such as sapphires, rubies, jades and pearls. Two sculptures of white elephants stand guard outside the museum entrance, and the ground floor is arranged like a market

with a variety of jewellery shops. It is close on Mondays and government holidays.

4 National Landmark Garden

The National Landmark Garden is Myanmar's largest park, located about 30 minutes' drive from downtown. In the garden are mock-up buildings of significant landmarks across the country's different states and divisions.

5 Water Fountain Garden

Located behind Nay Pyi Taw City Hall, Water Fountain Garden is flanked by an eye-catching steel-structure archway at its entrance. Inside, the garden consists of ponds, fountains, a 9.1m clock tower, and recreation centres, criss-crossed by wide buggy roads and footpaths. The highlight of the garden is a playground and water fountain complex, which features a musical light show every night.

A Haven of Hospitality and Heritage

The Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore At Zhongshan Park offer close to 800 rooms, a Halal-certified restaurant, a Straits Chinese restaurant and 540 square metres of meeting space equipped with free WiFi alongside a variety of dining options in Zhongshan Park as well as a shopping mall, all in one destination.

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Charting the ups and downs of aviation



Clockwise from top: Emirates is among the first full-service carriers to offer Wi-Fi on board its planes; aviation experts believe that an Airbus A380 superjumbo is more fuel efficient than most cars; will Virgin Atlantic bring commercial space tourism to fruition?

Sim Koh Chwee offers a window seat on the airline world in 2014, tracking a year of significant breakthroughs and tumult

GOOD



FOR far too long, hotels and airlines have levied hefty charges on Wi-Fi and Internet connection. Interestingly, small hotel chains were among the first to offer free connectivity and over time, the larger ones have followed – albeit mostly for “loyal premium guests”. In commercial aviation, it is an LCC – Norwegian Long Haul AS – that has extended complimentary Wi-Fi connection to its passengers and Emirates has followed suit.

Emirates is investing US\$20 million to equip its Airbus A380s and Boeing 777-300ERs with Wi-Fi connection, and passengers will initially receive the first 10MB of data for free and a token charge of one US dollar levied on the next 600MB. But the best is yet to come – the airline’s ultimate objective is to offer unlimited Wi-Fi access to all passengers on board its planes.



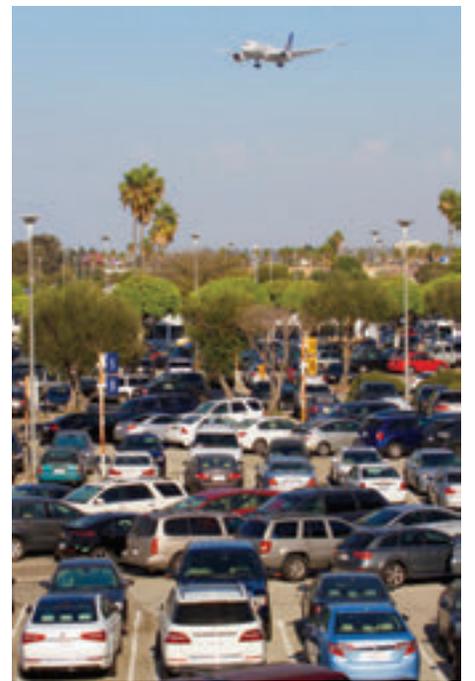
Airlines that have for years been polling their passengers for hints of the service innovations they wish to see on board planes need look no further – this is it. Now that the precedence has been set by an LCC and a full-service carrier, it is about time others follow or be overlooked by the ever-so-connected customers.



THE aviation industry has been unfairly blamed for climate change, noise pollution and other environmental issues. Great strides have been made by aircraft and engine manufacturers, and in 2014

more A380s and B787 Dreamliners had been delivered to airlines worldwide. The Dreamliner did not get off to a dream start but with most of its woes behind it, these quiet and fuel-efficient airplanes are now criss-crossing the globe and will soon be joined by the first Airbus A350s in 2015. Together with the B777-300ER, these airplanes have been instrumental in allowing airlines to retire their less efficient workhorses like the B747-400s and MD-11s.

Perhaps it is time for the aviation industry to be better at articulating the fact that it is now responsible for far less emission than ever before but continues to fa-



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BAD



MALAYSIA Airlines’ loss of a B777-200ER along with 12 crew members and 227 passengers in March 2014 mystified and intrigued the entire world for months, and the world is still no closer to finding remains of the airplane and its passengers. All the satellites hovering above the Earth and radars along its flight path have not been able to definitively pinpoint its

location. As governments and air forces deployed assets to search for the missing plane, first in the South China Sea and then the Straits of Malacca, Andaman Sea and Indian Ocean, valuable time was lost and with each passing week, hopes of finding any debris grew more remote.

The disappearance of an airliner this size is unprecedented and even as MH370 has gained more familiarity than any other flight number in history with the exception of Pan Am 103, there is a nagging and troubling fear that it may eventually prove more convenient and less costly to simply declare this B777 as lost.



SPACE travel has in recent years generated a significant buzz with much hopes riding on Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic. Many have registered their interest and paid huge deposits to be among the first to skim the edge of Earth's atmosphere, possibly as soon as in the spring of 2015.

On October 31, 2014, the space vehicle crashed on a test flight over the Mojave Desert killing its co-pilot. Although it was believed that human error might have been the cause of the crash, investigation could take more than a year. This could derail the planned launch of space travel but more importantly, it has shaken the confidence of some who have previously signed up for this bragging right. Unless the space craft is absolved of any form of technical failure and pilots are trained to a level that bolsters the confidence of this segment's high-profile and high net worth customers, the notion of space travel could once again be just a nebulous vision.



ON July 17, 2014, the ground war between Ukraine and Russian-backed rebels took an ugly turn when Malaysia Airlines' (MAS) flight MH17 on a B777-200ER was shot down, taking with it the lives of 15 crew members and 283 passengers. Rescue efforts were hampered as the ground war continued unabated in spite of assurances that rescuers could enter the crash site to retrieve human remains and belongings. Even as late as November, retrieval of aircraft parts was ongoing.

MAS could not be faulted for flying over Ukraine as international bodies such as the International Civil Aviation Organization and the Federal Aviation Administration have only warned of potential risks and advised airlines to exercise caution, the air route over eastern Ukraine was never closed. In the week preceding the shutdown of MH17, about 900 international flights transited above eastern Ukraine.

Following the incident, international airlines have completely amended their flight routings and skirted around Ukraine. Till now, nobody is any wiser about the origin of the missile that downed MH17, and the aviation industry – and MAS – carry this mystery into the new year.



IN recent years, air rage and assault on airline personnel and properties have become more common. Even when flights were delayed by inclement weather (in China), passengers have staged sit-ins on

board airplanes. In one instance, safety was severely compromised when passengers staging a sit-in on board an airplane in China ran onto the airport tarmac, but none faced charges and they instead received cash compensation from the airline.

Last August, a United Airlines flight from Newark to Denver was diverted to Chicago after a lady passenger threw water on a male passenger behind her for

using a Knee Defender, a device that enables a passenger to "lock" the seat in front and prevent it from being reclined. Both passengers were removed from the flight at Chicago and neither faced any charge as Chicago police and security agencies deemed this a "customer service issue".

And just last November, The Cranberries singer Dolores O'Riordan wearing heavy boots stamped on the foot of a cabin attendant, causing the latter's foot

to swell significantly. During her arrest, she head-butted a law enforcement officer and spat in his face. The singer was subsequently released into the custody of her mother and the case is pending.

Unless governments and law enforcement agencies are more willing to exercise their vested power to protect airline employees and travellers, air rage in airports and on board planes are likely to be more common.



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Experiences, not excursions

Focusing on authentic experiences helped travel companies weather a tumultuous 2014, says **Greg Lowe**



Wat Prajomklao Rachanusorn at Lampang, a lesser-known province in northern Thailand

Thailand's travel industry players are confident that creating new, specialised experiences are the way to attract niche travel groups and Millennials in order to recover from 2014's domestic political strife and coup d'état.

The Land of Smiles' tourism sector was hit hard in 2014, which saw the largest year-on-year decline of 8.6 per cent in arrivals from January to November, according to Immigration Bureau data.

Although the destination was set to achieve 25 million arrivals, its second

highest number ever, hotels and travel companies dealing with the mass market have been affected.

In the midst of this chaos, specialised companies have weathered the storm best.

"Tour operators that specialise in a niche, such as family travel, educational travel and community-based tourism are much less affected than larger 'generalists,'" said Willem Niemeijer, CEO of Khiri Group. "People are hungry for new experiences, especially those that involve authentic encounters with locals."

Tim Russell, marketing director of Remote Lands Thailand, agreed: "The big thing in Thailand this year has been small local tours from little travel start-ups like Taste of Thailand, Expique and LocalA-like, all of whom specialise in getting people into local areas and creating contact with real local people rather than just tour guides."

The Tourism Authority of Thailand, with its *12 hidden gems* campaign, is promoting emerging destinations to give both first-time and repeat visitors ideas that extend beyond traditional attractions.

"People want experiences, not excursions these days," observed Hans van den Born, managing director of Diethelm Travel Thailand, offering Baan Mae Kampong, a community-based ecotourism project in northern Thailand, as an example.

"It's a homestay project where small groups are welcomed by the village chief...They eat with the families, and its traditional northern food with curries and tea leaf salad. It's a really local view."

Finding such products is not without its challenges, and specialists have to be careful not to spoil these locations by over-exposing them to the market. "I recently saw an article on Baan Mae Kampong in the *Bangkok Post*," he said, "so I told our product manager to start looking for an alternative."

Philip Wigglesworth, business development director at Destination Asia Thailand, adds such demand is being driven in part by demographics. "Millennials are definitely more 'hands-on' and crave these

Destination in numbers

8.6%

Year-on-year drop in arrivals for January-November 2014

62.7%

Nationwide average occupancy rates for January-October 2014, down 14.1 percentage points from the same period last year

29 million

Tourism Authority of Thailand's arrivals target for 2015, with a revenue goal of 2.2 trillion baht (US\$66.6 billion)

VIEWPOINTS What are your business prospects for 2015?

Philip Wigglesworth, business development director, Destination Asia Thailand

For 2015 we remain optimistic – we continue to push forward and are looking to expand our market share in new markets. Our prospects look bright and, as long as we continue to offer and deliver top-quality services at competitive market prices and remain resilient to all the challenging forces in 2015, we hope it will be a good year for Destination Asia and Thailand alike.



Willem Niemeijer, CEO, Khiri Group

While I do not expect Thailand to fully return to pre-crisis levels in 2015, I do think we will see a healthy increase over 2014. The country has one of the best value propositions in the region – fantastic natural resources and a natural hospitality in its culture that is second to none. Tour operators know this – and their clients too. We expect them to be putting Thailand back on top of the list (this) year. In short: I am very optimistic.



type of experiences."

Street food tours are one recent trend which has proven popular with all types of groups, he said.

Some destinations are better suited than others in going local. Niemeijer says Bangkok offers a rich array of options including walking tours and using local transport to explore rarely visited parts of the capital, such as Pak Kret.

New multi-country opportunities are also emerging. "The overland trips we started (last) year, using the newly opened Mae Sot-Myawaddy border, create a spectrum of possibilities for both Thailand and Myanmar tourism. On the Thai side of the border, it opens up little-known areas like Tak and Umphang, which were too far out of the way to include in more mainstream Thailand-only programmes," said Khiri's Niemeijer.

Provinces such as Nan and Phrae in Thailand, which suffer from poor connectivity, can now be easily added on to a tour of neighbouring Laos.

Said Wigglesworth: "You can achieve a local experience in any Thailand destination, you just need to focus on what you'd like to see and experience."

HOW TO SELL

DO Expique offers sightseeing with a difference through its range of small group tours in Bangkok, which can be done on foot, cycle or tuk tuk. Options include exploring the city by day and night, visiting lesser-known temples and markets, and learning about the historical influences of Eastern and Western architecture on the local cityscape. Photography tours are also on offer.

SEE The Hall of Opium is arguably one of the best museums in Thailand, but it is too often overlooked. The impressive permanent exhibition documents 5,000 years of use and abuse of the poppy-derived drug and charts its trade throughout the region and in Thailand, from the scurrilous days of the British East India Company and the resulting Opium Wars with imperial China to the present day. It makes an excellent addition to a trip to Chiang Rai and the Golden Triangle.

EAT Bangkok's culinary scene has flourished in recent years and the city added another feather to its cap in December with the opening of **L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon**. Run by chef Robuchon, who has the most Michelin stars in the world (25 at last count), the restaurant serves haute cuisine in an open-style workshop surroundings. Bookings are essential at this hot spot.

STAY Located on Kata beach on the south-western tip of Phuket, **Kata Rocks** offers luxurious seclusion for high-budget clients with its offering of 34 oceanfront Sky Villas, each of which boasts a private infinity pool and terrace among its facilities. The restaurant combines influences from Thailand, the Mediterranean and Australasia, while the Infinite Luxury Spa offers a host of therapeutic and wellness treatments.



WHAT'S NEW

1 Water parks make a splash

2014 was year of the water park, beginning with the opening of Splashdown Waterpark Pattaya in early 2014.

This was followed by the launch of Cartoon Network Amazone in October last year. The park features 10 themed zones, water roller coasters and the world's largest aqua playground with more than 150 different water features.

When Ramayana Water Park opens in the middle of this year in Pattaya, it will become the largest water park in Thailand.

Hua Hin, home to Black Mountain Waterpark, also welcomed Vana Nava Hua Hin since last December.

2 New boutique hotels at Khao Yai

The area surrounding Khao Yai National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site north-east of Bangkok, saw a number of hotel openings last year, strengthening its upper-scale offerings for both international and domestic tourists.

Botanica Khao Yai is perhaps the most contemporary of the recent additions. The 116-room property sits on the edge of jungle-clad hills and features a spa, swimming pools and a barbecue pit, among its facilities.

Escape Khao Yai, a smaller property with 54 rooms and villas, is also located near the park and has its own organic garden, produce from which is served in the



From left: Asian-inspired comfort food at Namsaah Bottling Trust; Khao Yai National Park

restaurant.

Thames Valley is, without a doubt, the most eclectic opening in the area. Modelled on a village in England's Home Counties, the villas are fashioned on rural cottages and the resort even boasts its own mini-castle, which serves as a restaurant and events space.

3 Bangkok's fine dining scene

Last year marked the opening of a number of world-class restaurants in the Thai

capital. Peppina, the sister of the popular Roman-style Appia, has opened to offer Neapolitan-style pizzas.

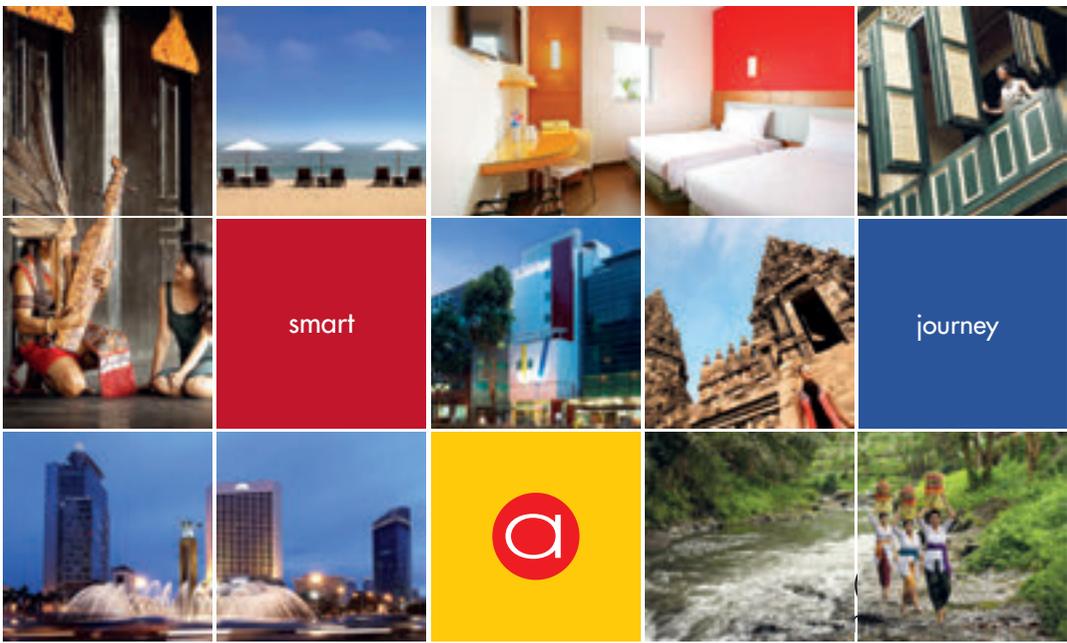
Fans of modern Thai cooking welcomed the arrival of Namsaah Bottling Trust, chef Ian Kittichai's latest outlet that serves Asian-inspired comfort food in a renovated town mansion.

However, the best comes last, with the December openings of Origins, where young chef Marcus Townsend serves five-to 33-course menus.

4 Shopping galore in Thailand

Thailand's luxury retail market benefited from new mall openings last year. Central Embassy brought international brand boutiques and galleries and gourmet dining options. Siam Square One offers a lower-scale but more youth-focused array of shops and eateries.

Beyond Bangkok, the March launch of Central Festival Samui marked the arrival of the island's first large-size, high-end shopping development.



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Culinary tourism is ripe for development

Niche areas like food and adventure could help strengthen Vietnam's appeal in order to shake off its image as a one-time destination, writes [Xinyi Liang-Pholsena](#)



An open-air market in Dalat

Despite being blessed with over 3,000 km of coastline, a bounty of breathtaking natural attractions and an impressive cultural heritage, Vietnam has not been able to attract hordes of repeat visitors each year the way its regional rivals have.

Jack Bartholomew, regional director Indochina, Khiri Travel, said: "Vietnam has an issue as a destination in that it's not a big draw for returning customers. We see that our travellers tend to visit Vietnam only once, whereas we see in our other destinations more repeat clients; they visit and then want to come back to see the country again and see their local friends, guides, etc."

Anton Jurgens, general manager, Exo Travel Vietnam, agreed: "Until recently most visitors have seen Vietnam as a one-time destination, which is evident in the number of itineraries that encompass the entire country. Most inbound DMCs offer the standard Hanoi/Halong/Hue/Hoi An/Ho Chi Minh City package with small variations on theme."

However, he was positive that the situation would change, especially as airport and road infrastructure development as well as growing accommodation choices have improved accessibility throughout the country and given the country more prominence among travellers.

Jurgens added: "There are now more choices, and travellers realise they cannot do it all in one trip. Furthermore, we are seeing an increase in feedback indicating that people would prefer to stay longer and explore the culture deeper. Multi-country itineraries are growing

in popularity, which often only give a glimpse and encourage repeat visits. Investment into beach holidays and adventure will be sure to attract more repeat business."

Carving out niche segments like food and adventure tourism could also be helpful in strengthening Vietnam's destination branding amid stiff competition in the region, said local travel operators.

At a conference jointly organised by the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Vietnamese embassy in the UK in November 2014, it was suggested that the country should focus on its culinary delights to attract more European tourists.

"Culinary is obviously a niche market Vietnam should promote due to the rich culture of its 54 minorities," commented Thang Luong, CEO & co-founder, Handspan Travel Indochina. "We have not yet promoted Vietnam's culinary attractions. However, we have listed some short street life tours including street food tours on our website, and more FITs interested in such tours are sending us requests."

While adventure continues to be a strong segment for Exo Travel, Jurgens also observed growth in culinary-focused requests.

On the other hand, HG Travel product manager Alexander Leven opined that Vietnam need not position itself in a niche. "As for mass advertising, the country has one world-class attraction on par with the Pyramids, Machu Picchu, the Great Barrier Reef – Halong Bay.

"While more refined strategies and diverse products might work on a B2B

level or clients familiar with the destination, in order to attract consumers from new markets we should use our biggest USP – people," he added, suggesting that meet-the-local encounters be promoted.

Khiri's Bartholomew added: "If Vietnam's extremely diverse and fascinating history was played up compared to the more obvious Indochina wars in recent history, I think people would be possibly more inclined to visit."

The identification of niche areas aside, the greatest bugbear still lies in the lack of international promotion of Vietnam on the authorities' part, based on industry feedback.

Lac Hong Voyages' business development director Tan Robert said: "Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) should do more global ad publicity and participate in more global trade shows, just like (the NTOs in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand), unlike now whereby each tour operator is left to promote Vietnam alone. Uniform materials on all places of attraction should also be given to all tour operators to enable them to promote better."

HG Travel's Leven agreed: "I hope for an improved budget in our international branding. Currently Vietnam Airlines is doing most of the promotion for the country and VNAT is trying its best. In Vietnam we don't have the 'amazing' visitor numbers of Thailand, the 'incredible' economic development of India or 'truly' high income from oil like Malaysia, so we have to work on a smaller scale in comparison to our competitors."

VIEWPOINTS

What are your business prospects for 2015?



Thang Luong,
CEO & co-founder, Handspan Travel Indochina

It seems Vietnam has overcome

its most difficult period. The GDP has slightly increased and inflation is well controlled. The overall economic picture seems brighter and brighter. We are really looking forward to better business in 2015. Latin America is a new market that we are targeting, and we are also putting in more effort using new online marketing tools for traditional countries like Germany, America and Australia.

Alexander Leven,
product manager, HG Travel



We saw very good results for the Western markets in 2014 and are planning for steady growth.

For our Chinese visitors, our aim is to regain their trust in Vietnam. The forecast doesn't look as bad as mid-2014 when the whole market collapsed. We are receiving surprisingly high booking numbers for 2015 and hope to get back to 2013's level in the next six months. Our market share has also increased significantly.

To predict the Russian market is like playing lottery. The incentive and upmarket (segments) seem to be on the rise though.

Destination in numbers

7.2 million

The number of international visitors to Vietnam for January-November 2014, a year-on-year increase of 5.4 per cent

1.8 million

The number of visitors from China for January-November 2014, which, despite plunging in the aftermath of the anti-Chinese protests, still posted a year-on-year gain of 5.1 per cent

7.5 million

The number of international foreign visitor arrivals targeted in 2015

61.2%

The occupancy in Vietnam's hotels from January-September 2014, a 3.8 per cent dip year-on-year, according to STR Global

2.7 million

The average daily rate in Vietnamese dong, equivalent to US\$126, recorded among Vietnam's hotels from January-September 2014, a 3.8 per cent growth year-on-year, also from STR Global



From left: Dusit Thani Cam Ranh; Emperor Cruises; The Reverie Saigon

WHAT'S NEW

1 Dusit Thani steps into Vietnam

Thailand's Dusit International will roll out its first Dusit Thani hotel in Vietnam, Dusit Thani Cam Ranh, to be developed as part of the Cam Ranh Flowers Resort. Planned for opening in late 2016, the beachfront hotel on Bai Dai Beach comprises 266 deluxe, suite and bungalow categories, with a further 56 residential villas and 117 apartments available for purchase or rental. Guests will be able to enjoy the signature Devarana Spa as well as a sports centre with swimming pools.

2 Vietnam Airlines links Phu Quoc with Singapore, Siem Reap

As Phu Quoc emerges as a regional beach destination with the recent addition of four- and five-star properties, Vietnam Airlines has launched new international direct flights linking the island with Singapore and Siem Reap. The twice-weekly

Phu Quoc-Singapore service started on November 2, 2014 on an Airbus A321, while the thrice-weekly Phu Quoc-Siem Reap route began operations from December 18, 2014 using ATR-72.

3 Emperor Cruises in Nha Trang

DMC Luxury Travel Vietnam and cruise company Huong Hai Ha Long have come together to launch Emperor Cruises in Nha Trang Bay. Emperor Cruises' fleet includes a junk cruise boat that will start operations in March 2015, accommodating 32 passengers for day cruises, sunset cocktails and dinner cruises.

Debuting in August 2015 is also an overnight luxury cruise ship that can house 36 guests in 18 en-suite cabins with private balconies. The newly built, colonial-style ship will feature three decks that house a smart restaurant, two lounge bars, a small library, two saunas, four massage

rooms, a kids' play room and a gym.

4 The Reverie Saigon

The Reverie Saigon is set to debut in Ho Chi Minh City in 2Q2015, adding another luxury property to the city's expanding hospitality sector.

Situated within a 39-storey, mixed-use development, the 286-key hotel will boast room interiors that feature furnishings and craftsmanship by Italian design houses such as Provasi, Colombo Stile, Visionnaire and Giorgetti. Facilities include an outdoor pool with views of the Saigon River and city skyline, a spa and fitness centre, a Chinese restaurant, and a fleet of Bentleys and Rolls-Royces.

5 Scenic Spirit on the Mekong

Scenic Tours' latest luxury river cruise ship, *Scenic Spirit*, will launch on the Mekong River in January 2016. The ship boasts 34 suites ranging in size from the 32m² Deluxe Suite, complete with a sun lounge, to the 80m² Royal Panorama Suite with four separate zones. Amenities include four dining venues, a resort-style pool deck and bar, a full spa, a sun deck with open-air cinema, complimentary beverages, butler service, plus an elevator between decks. Travelling over eight days between Ho Chi Minh City and Siem Reap, the five-star boat caters to 68 guests and boasts an almost 1:1 guest-to-staff ratio.

HOW TO SELL

DO Joining a cooking class is one of the best ways to get acquainted with Vietnamese cuisine. **Hanoi Cooking Centre**, located on 44 Chau Long Street at the edge of the city's famous Old Quarter, offers hands-on cooking classes and market tours designed by chef Tracey Lister, co-author of *KOTO - A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam*. Courses are available for corporates as well as for kids.

SEE Hanoi's **Old Quarter**, which dates back some 2,000 years, is a warren of mainly 36 streets organised according to produce, where shops of the same kind can be found on the same lane. Notable streets include Hang Bac, which specialises in gold and silver jewellery; Hang Ma, famed for its paper products; and Luong Ngoc Quyen, an avenue lined with food stalls offering traditional cakes and snacks. A walk through this historic district will give visitors a better understanding of the city's past and a chance to pick up local souvenirs at the same time.

EAT A Vietnamese institution popular among locals and tourists alike, **Nha Hang Ngon** continues to draw crowds with its meld of street food-meets-colonial chic ambience, serving up a diverse array of Vietnamese specialties from around the country. Diners can opt to sit indoors in the beautifully restored French villa or outdoors among the frangipani-lined courtyard.

STAY Opened in September 2014, the five-star **Lotte Hotel Hanoi** is now the tallest hotel in Vietnam, occupying the upper floors of a new skyscraper located between the city's Old Town and New Business District. The 318-room hotel is home to F&B options such as Top of Hanoi, an open-air rooftop brasserie; Tim Ho Wan, Vietnam's first Michelin-starred dim sum house; and Pharaoh's Bar & Upper, which offers cocktails and views of the city on floors 63 and 64.

The Evian Spa is equipped with its own executive suite, a luxurious pool, a salt studio and six treatment rooms.



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PEOPLE TO WATCH

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**MARIO
HARDY**

CEO
PATA

What he's done

Taking over from loud and unmissable Martin Craigs last November, he has – literally – big shoes to fill. Yet listening to the soft-spoken Hardy share about his plans for the 60-year-old association, one immediately comes away thinking this guy is sharp, but also extremely down to earth. In other words, he has substance. No stranger to the industry, Hardy has been working in travel for nearly 30 years, while living in Asia for over a decade.

Why he's worth watching

While one of his top priorities is to ensure the non-profit doesn't see red ink in its balance sheet this year, more efforts will also be channelled into the online space.

Drawing from his own experience of running popular coffee blog Map2Cafe, Hardy has already gotten the ball rolling on a number of digital initiatives such as a new and improved PATA.org as well as a sustainability-focused website.

Further down the line, Hardy also wants to relook at how membership is structured, adopting a tiered model where members pay according to the benefits they get rather than what industry category they belong to. – **Gracia Chiang**

**MAHESH
SHARMA**

Tourism minister
India

What he's done

A doctor by profession, the first-time member of the Indian Parliament was appointed as the new minister of state (independent charge), tourism, culture and civil aviation last November.

Sharma announced soon after assuming office that the safety of tourists would be one of his priorities. As a first step, he ordered that tourist taxis must install electronic chips to track their movement. He also said that the government would introduce a helicopter service in the Buddhist circuit and facilitation centres for foreign tourists at all international airports.

Why he's worth watching

It will be interesting to see how his ministry leverages the much anticipated e-visa system that has been rolled out for citizens of 43 countries. Launched end-2014, the scheme is expected to simplify the visa application process, with visas being offered within five days after online submission.

Sharma is also expected to soon begin an aggressive cleanliness campaign for all tourist sites in India, as well as implement measures to promote medical tourism. – **Rohit Kaul**

**JAIME
BAUTISTA**

President and CEO
Philippine Airlines

What he's done

In October 2014, Bautista returned to Philippine Airlines (PAL) after tycoon Lucio Tan bought back 49 per cent of the flag carrier, which was sold to San Miguel Corp two years ago.

Credited for steering PAL during its most turbulent past out of financial rehabilitation and receivership, it's going to be a bumpy ride even for Bautista who's mapping out a new direction to bring PAL back to profitability.

Why he's worth watching

Bautista's most immediate concern is the review of PAL's re-fleeting programme which, under ex-president and COO Ramon Ang, included the purchase of at least 54 new aircraft likely to lead to financial losses for 2014 and this year.

PAL is also looking for a strategic partner, preferably a foreign airline investor, to improve its cash flow.

As for network, Bautista and his team seem keen on developing the US and Middle East, but not Europe unlike the previous management. – **Rosa Ocampo**

**BENITO
BENGZON JR**

Tourism
assistant secretary
Philippines

What he's done

After taking primary lead on tourism marketing efforts at the Department of Tourism, Bengzon geared the department's focus on growing new country markets as head of the Market Development Group (MDG), which initially targeted three key segments: English as a second language, diving and medical tourism.

Why he's worth watching

Tourism undersecretary and MICE marketing guru Daniel Corpuz has resigned, which places Bengzon next in line.

Meanwhile, Bengzon has expanded marketing emphasis particularly on cruise destinations like Puerto Princesa, Pangasinan and Ilocos. It is also expected that MDG's efforts will pay off for more long-stay, luxury markets such as Eastern Europe, Spain, France, the UAE and Russia. – **Marianne Carandang**

**CC
ZHUANG**

CEO and co-founder
Qunar

What he's done

Heading one of China's most influential travel companies, Zhuang has transformed the once meta-search engine into an ecosystem that encompasses OTA, yield management and more. In 2011, Qunar had 200 employees, but today, the number has swelled to 8,000.

Applying his engineering background to the travel industry, Zhuang is a firm believer in milking all possible efficiencies from the distribution business. He makes no bones about wanting suppliers to cut commissions in order to eliminate inefficient travel distribution players.

Why he's worth watching

Expect Qunar to become China's market leader not just for flights but hotels. While it became profitable in 2011, the company has deliberately gone into loss-making mode over the last year or so as it expands in areas such as hotel sales and revenue management for airlines.

While the company claims to have 25 per cent of the domestic air market, it is behind when it comes to hotels – around five per cent. To address that, Zhuang hired nearly 3,000 salespersons last year to sign on more hotels. – **Gracia Chiang**

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NEW ATTRACTIONS IN MALAYSIA

Various new and exciting tourism offerings and luxury hotels are set to boost Malaysia's tourism industry further.

Mitsui Outlet Park KLIA

Once completed early this year, Mitsui Outlet Park KLIA will be the largest factory outlet centre in Southeast Asia with 140 outlets offering luxury brands, fashion apparel and accessories, outdoor goods, a Japanese specialty store and an amusement park. Its convenient location just 6km from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) is expected to be a hit with both tourists and airport transit passengers.

Twentieth Century Fox World

This much-anticipated movie-inspired international theme park, the first of its kind in the world, is expected to open in 2016, at Resorts World Genting. It will feature more than 25 rides and attractions based on various well-known movies, such as Ice Age, Rio, Night at the Museum, and Alien vs Predator, to name a few.

The Els Club Teluk Datai

The Els Club Teluk Datai was crowned "World's Best New Golf Course" at the inaugural World Golf Awards 2014 in Portugal. Located on the beautiful island of Langkawi, it features an 18-hole par 72 golf course set against the stunning rainforest and Andaman Sea. Malaysia was also conferred "Asia's Best Golf Destination 2014" while Kota Permai Golf & Country Club took the "Malaysia's Best Golf Course" title at the same event.

Angry Birds Park Johor

The much talked about Angry Birds Park in Johor, Malaysia, opened late last year to the delight of families everywhere. This new attraction complements the existing Legoland and Hello Kitty Town theme parks in the same Johor vicinity, offering fun and interactive physical and educational activities for the whole family.

St. Regis Kuala Lumpur

Scheduled to open in November 2015, the St. Regis Kuala Lumpur is located just minutes' away from major tourist attractions such as the National Museum, Lake Gardens and the Bukit Bintang shopping paradise. It offers 200 luxury guest rooms, three fine-dining restaurants, professional meeting facilities, and the exclusive Remède Spa.

Nobu Kuala Lumpur

The recent opening of world-famous Nobu restaurant in Kuala Lumpur has just made the city that much more exciting. Serving up contemporary Japanese cuisine with Latin American flavours, Nobu delivers sophisticated fine-dining on the 56th level of PETRONAS Twin Towers offering diners both a feast and a view to take your breath away!

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CLEMENT WONG



Founder & CEO
BeMyGuest

What he's done
Wong founded BeMyGuest in 2012, and has since not taken a step out of place. It secured S\$500,000 (US\$385,356) in angel funding in 2013 and purchased Indiescapes early-2014, before bagging a further S\$1 million in funding when it won Channel NewsAsia's Start-up Asia Competition. Now offering over 5,000 live products, BeMyGuest has been hailed as the world's largest online booking platform for tours and activities in Asia. The company has released the world's first mobile application for suppliers beginning with Android, with the iOS version released end-2014.

Why he's worth watching
Wong has proven to be an astute businessman, and is keen to empower suppliers and travel agencies to make dealings online a painless process. At the same time, demand for experiential travel is skyrocketing and the need for unique itineraries has never been more pressing. — Hannah Koh

FAISAL MEMON



Founder & CEO
Illusions Online

What he's done
Warm, effusive and a visionary in his own right, Memon wants to eradicate unnecessary complication in the travel industry through a unified technology. Driven by a twin engine consisting of a system to streamline agency work processes and a global distribution platform, Memon is leading the charge into the Asia-Pacific region. Illusions has launched Bangkok and Sydney offices, and is planning to build a team in the Philippines to handle data.

Why he's worth watching
Key to his ambitions is the cross-selling platform iWTX that gathers inventory from DMC/tour operator users of the Illusions online system and distributes internationally, giving users more visibility. Will he turn iWTX into the Alibaba or Amazon of the travel industry? Watch this space. — Hannah Koh

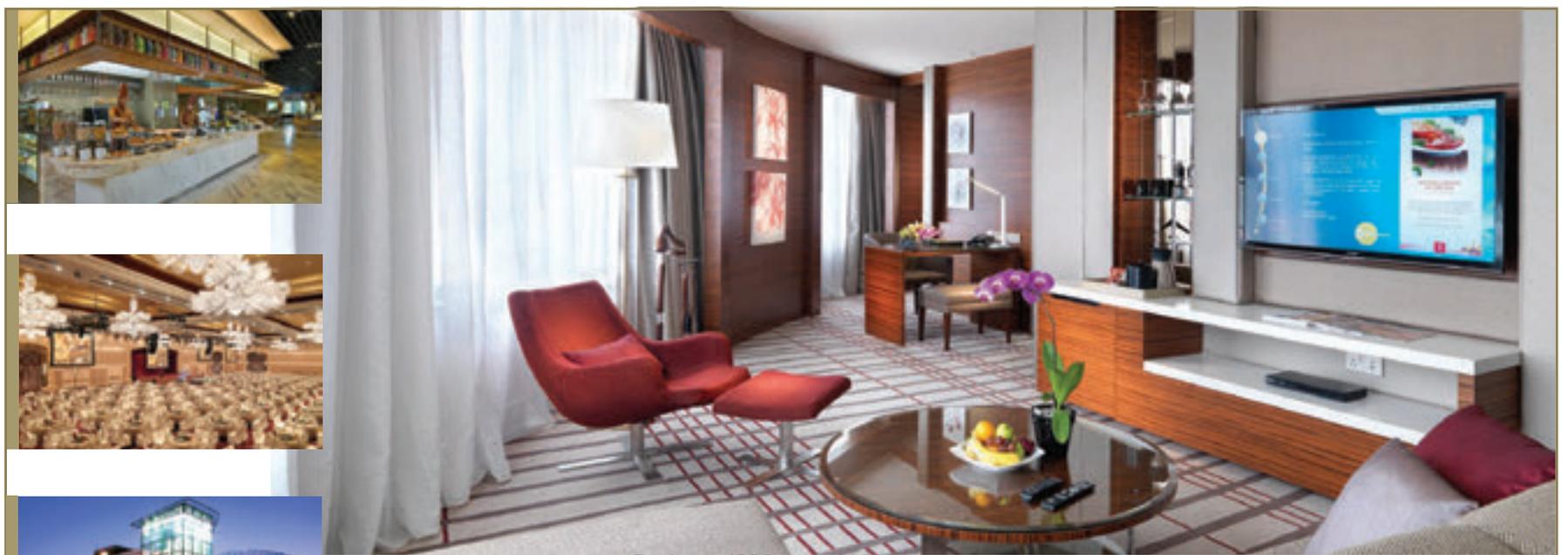
TUROCHAS FUAD



Co-founder
Travelmob

What he's done
Despite his age (40), Fuad was not afraid to take a large gamble by creating a vacation rental site for Asians at a time when no other Asian companies had ventured into this space. In 2012, he left his stable job as Skype's Asia-Pacific managing director for an unknown start-up life, convincing his pregnant wife that this was what he wanted to do. Having raised seed funding to the tune of US\$1 million within a few months, the money was used to grow the team, expedite platform development and roll out to key markets in Asia-Pacific.

Why he's worth watching
Last October, Travelmob introduced a concierge service to help travellers find ideal villas in Bali. I foresee more of such marriages between online and offline offerings, allowing the company to cater to varied travel behaviour. There will also likely be more development on apps, considering that almost half of their users access the site through mobile devices. — S Puvaneswary



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Who's on our radar

ANTHONY TAN



Co-founder
MyTeksi

What he's done

Tan had an unselfish vision to make taxis in Kuala Lumpur safer for women and, at the same time, help taxi drivers earn extra income. Thus, a simple idea of revamping the taxi business was devised using smartphone technology. Once a booking is confirmed, the passenger gets the taxi driver's name and contact details on their phone. Personally, I have benefited from Tan's innovation, as it is now easier to get a taxi during peak hours and in remote parts of the Klang Valley, away from the main roads.

Why he's worth watching

MyTeksi is expanding fast. Known as GrabTaxi outside of Malaysia, it is in five other countries, namely Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

Expect more innovations beyond services for commuters – the company has been mulling the idea of delivering goods to people, like food delivery to office workers, a modern version of India's dabbawallas. – **S Puvaneswary**

CLIFFORD NEO



Managing director
Dynasty Travel

What he's done

When he first joined his father's business in 2004, many wondered if a young entrepreneur without any travel-related experience could survive in a very competitive industry, but Neo has proven his doubters wrong.

Over the last decade, he has led many technology-driven initiatives, becoming the first travel agency in Singapore to launch its own iPhone app in 2012. Dynasty Travel was also the winner of *TTG Asia's* inaugural Innovator Award last year in recognition of its efforts to enhance staff mobility and efficiency.

Why he's worth watching

Among Neo's latest initiatives are iPad minis to improve productivity and increase marketing reach. Employees are now able to make live bookings for customers buying its packaged tours and promotional offers. His company has also set up an IT arm to develop its own software, and looks set to roll out new innovative products to take the industry by storm. – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

SHAFRAZ FAZLEY



Founder &
managing director
Viluxur

What he's done

It was sheer hard work and determination that led a 30-year-old Fazley to start his own travel company in 2010. A Sri Lankan national, he worked for a few years in the Maldives before launching Viluxur, eventually commanding a 20-30 per cent stake of the Chinese market to the Maldives. A few years later, he opened Viluxur's Colombo office, and helped Sri Lanka grow its number of Chinese arrivals.

In four years, Fazley had positioned Viluxur as a luxury brand. From just 10 employees, Viluxur now has over 100 of them in four offices around the world.

Why he's worth watching

A GSA in the Maldives and Sri Lanka, Viluxur plans to launch one new destination a year, with Mauritius, Seychelles and Bali next on the radar. It also hopes to create new travel brands to cater to niche markets. Fazley is firm on timelines for goals like the five-year deadline he has set to turn the DMC into Asia's leading luxury travel consultancy. – **Feizal Samath**

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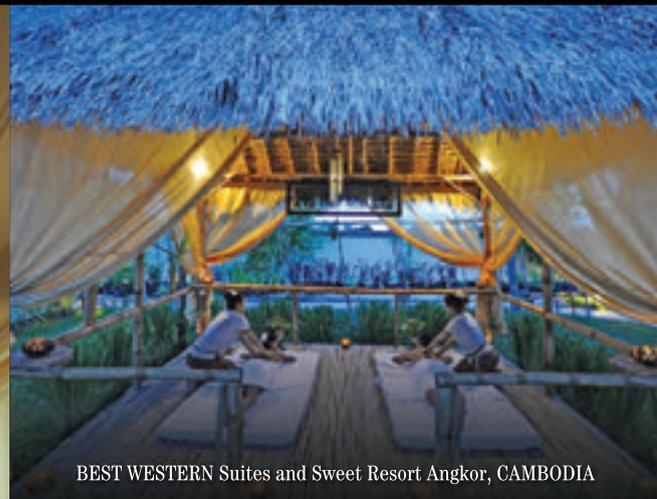
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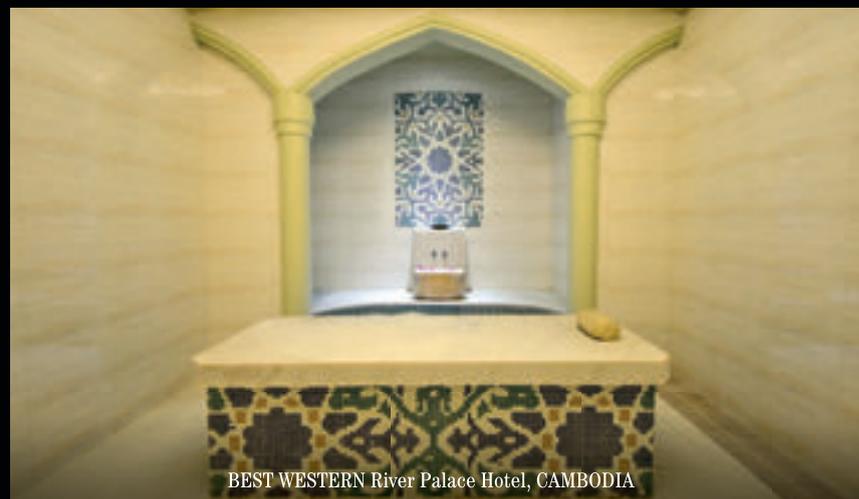
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For the rising number of visitors to Vietnam, Best Western now offers hotels in three of the country's most desirable destinations - the charming highland town of Dalat, the beach resort of Nha Trang, and historic Hue, with its collection of UNESCO World Heritage-listed treasures.

And in the tourism paradise of Thailand, our vast collection of 11 hotels and resorts now stretches from the bustling streets of Bangkok to the blissful beaches of Phuket and Koh Phangan. And our hotel in Buriram offers guests the chance to get off the beaten track and explore Thailand's exotic northeast, with its incredible array of ancient temples.



BEST WESTERN River Palace Hotel, CAMBODIA

Finally in emerging Myanmar, Best Western's hotel in the heart of Yangon overlooks the golden spires of the Shwedagon Pagoda, while new properties will soon start welcoming guests to the legendary city of Mandalay and the modern capital, Nay Pyi Taw. And whichever hotel you choose, all guests are guaranteed Best Western's global brand promises of excellent service and free Wi-Fi – even in the most remote corners of Indochina!

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News

BA connects the UK and Malaysia again

MAS will no longer dominate the London-Kuala Lumpur route

By S Puvaneswary

HAVING suspended flights in 2001 as global travel slowed following the 9/11 incident, British Airways (BA) will resume direct daily flights from London to Kuala Lumpur from May 27.

BA will be operating the B777-200ER, and increase capacity by 219 seats on a route currently monopolised by Malaysia Airlines (MAS).

MAS flies twice daily on this route using the Airbus A380 with seats for 500 passengers.

Saif-ul Haque, CEO of London-based Halcyon Collections, said the BA brand has mileage and will create interest in the destination with marketing and PR efforts to re-establish the route.

He added: "Certain high-end clients of mine are BA fans; they believe in its service, so its re-

entry will help prop up business."

However, David Carlaw, head of UK-based Faraway Product, Premier Holidays, is more cautious. He said it will be advantageous if BA has code-share agreements with other airlines for additions to other destinations like Penang, Langkawi, Singapore and Thailand, as customers also want to travel beyond Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia's inbound travel operators are also upbeat about BA's return. Arokia Das, senior manager at Luxury Tours Malaysia, said: "Extra capacity and competition on this route will reduce air fares, which is good for the traveller. Traditionally, the UK has been the top inbound European market to Malaysia, and extra capacity gives room for growth for both inbound and outbound travel.

"We plan to strengthen our presence in the UK by setting up a sales office in London in 2H2015 to cover both UK and Germany."

The MICE segment is expected to be positive too. Diethelm Malaysia managing director, Manfred Kurz, said additional capacity on this direct route will also allow MICE organisers from the UK to bring in bigger groups.

"The weakened ringgit has also made the destination more affordable; we will talk to our partners in the UK to look at new promotions we can do together to further promote Malaysia."

Adam Kamal, CEO, Rakyat Travel, said the company will start looking at opportunities to get a share of the MICE business from the UK and Europe by participating in IMEX and EIBTM.

CLARIFICATION

In Issue 2 page 2 of the *Daily*, the caption should read Ministry of Hotels and Tourism Myanmar's U Htay Aung.



Adam: Chance for more MICE business

Singaporeans choosing Myanmar

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

SINGAPOREANS are heading to Myanmar due to enhanced connectivity and a growing interest in the destination.

Tigerair operates seven flights to Yangon weekly, which are in "strong demand consistently" said Teh Yik Chuan, director of sales and marketing.

Jetstar Asia capacity on this route, with 10 weekly flights to Yangon, also increased 40 per cent in 2013, while SilkAir launched thrice-weekly services to Mandalay last June.

Chan Brothers Travel marketing communications head, Jane Chang, said the surge in demand commenced only about three years ago – doubling annually.

She said: "It's always a draw to visit a destination not seen by too many travellers. Yangon is still the more requested city, but over time, we hope to migrate the routes to lesser-known cities like Bagan and Mandalay."

Dynasty Travel director of marketing communications, Alicia Seah, said popular destinations like Bagan, Mandalay and Inle Lake are drawing interest due to their rich culture and heritage, adding that visitors largely comprise the well-heeled ones.

Chang concurs, highlighting the rising prices there. "Support and subsidies from tourism bodies will go very far in generating awareness among Singaporeans," she suggested.



A strong turnout from staff of Aureum Palace Hotels & Resorts Myanmar and sister hotel Kandawgyi Palace Myanmar at MICC 1



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Snapshots

Getting down to business

By Eugene Tang



Furama Silom Bangkok's Sararut Laocharoen, Furama Bukit Bintang Kuala Lumpur's Lily Khoo, Felda Investment Corporation Malaysia's Megat Shahrul Azman Abas, Furama Hotels International Management Singapore's Vione Tan and Shirlena Tan, and FuramaXclusive Resort Indonesia's Jennifer Suryadi



Putrajaya International Convention Centre Malaysia's Rafidah Mohd Razali

Goway Travel US' Diane Molzan



Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort's Wipawadee Nganpeerapong, Outrigger Phi Phi Island Resort and Spa's Sopida Kongpetch, and Outrigger Laguna Phuket Resort and Villas' Duanphen Klirkrong



Bangkok Airways' Thanut Na Nakon Chanachon, Ekdanai Ngangan, Nang Hom Tip, and Chulin Kocharoen



Singapore Airlines Myanmar's Jeanette Lee, Kyi Phyu Thant, and Lim Wei Peng



Entourage Bangladesh's Rezaul Ekram and Nilufar Banu



Libra Bulgaria's Greta Veselinova and Au Tigre Vanille Switzerland's Silvia Fabbri



HanaTour Service South Korea's Min-Tae Yun



Meier's Weltreisen Germany's Beate Helmes



Shiva Travels Nepal's Arjun Sharma



Tourism Authority of Thailand's Patsee Permvongsenee, Amnuay Thiamkeerakul, Pongsathorn Kessasamli and Wiwatchai Boonyapak, and Tourism Authority of Thailand Vietnam's Chutathip Chareonlarp



Wyndham Hotel Group Singapore's Tony Cousins

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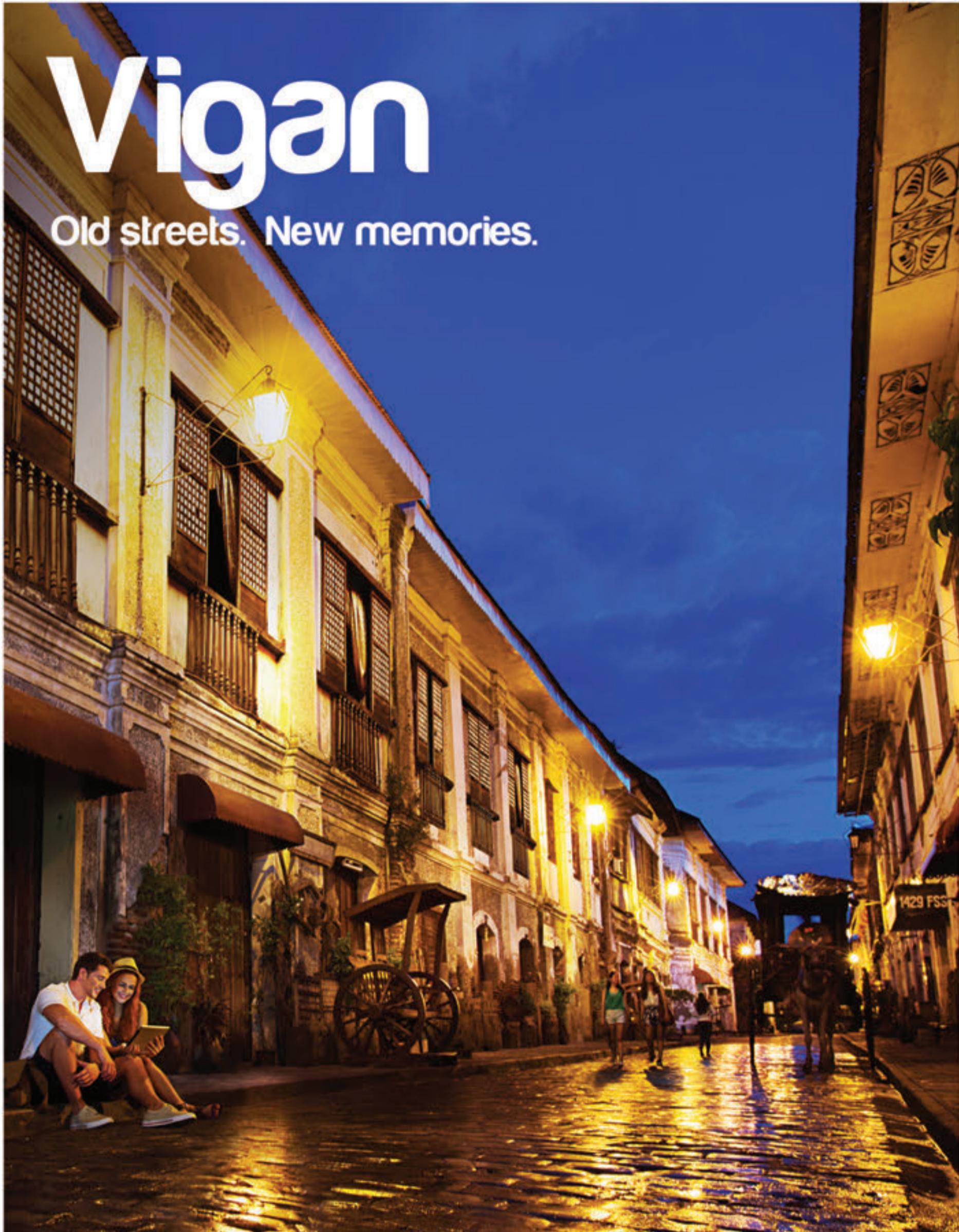
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Vigan

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- 📍 More Things to Do:
- Enjoy the local breakfast favorite of Vigan longganisa (garlicky sausage).
 - Relive the country's colonial past at different heritage museums and mansions.
 - Ride a kalesa (horse-drawn carriage) down Calle Crisologo.
 - Learn how to make a burnay (traditional clay jar).
 - Enjoy the merienda (afternoon snack) buffet of Filipino specialties at Hotel Luna's Chuda Bar.





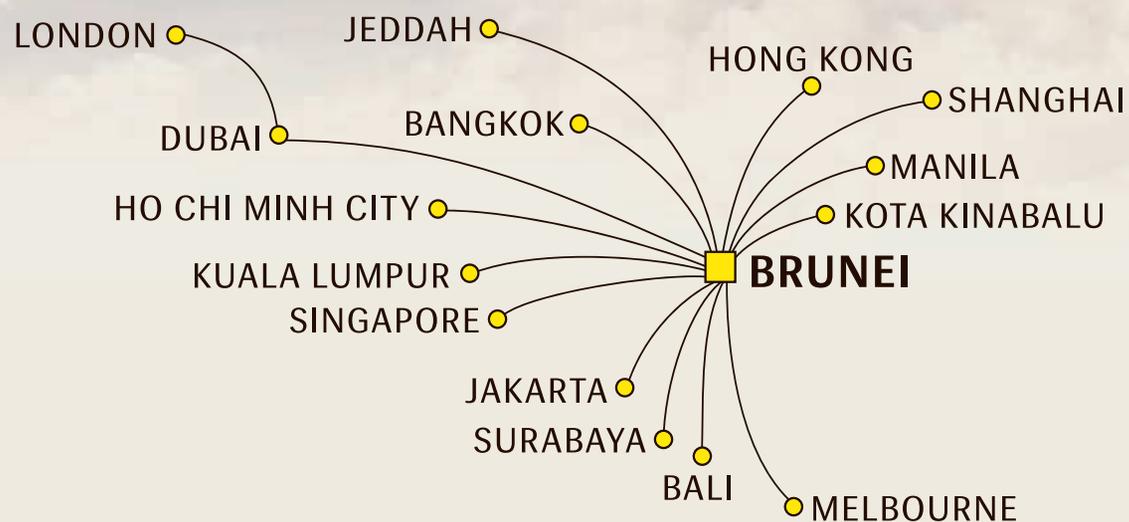
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