



ITB
Asia

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Issue

1

How MBS nabbed ITB

Nonplussed Suntec says it has not lost events due to upgrade

By Raini Hamdi

MARINA Bay Sands (MBS), which has wrested ITB Asia from Suntec Singapore, said it was not overly generous in its bid, despite throwing in a host of sweeteners including bringing and accommodating an additional 100 of its worldwide buyers, hosting ITB Asia's opening receptions and VIP C-suite lunches, and even offering free WiFi to all delegates.

Las Vegas Sands' SVP worldwide sales and resort marketing Asia, John Mims, said the deal was consistent with the company's "partnership" approach for all tradeshows and events.

Mims said: "ITB Asia is coming onto its own, so for us, it's a great opportunity to partner them over the next three years, hopefully longer, and help make the show bigger and premier."

"All of the tradeshows, meetings, etc with us are partnerships in one way or another. It is in our interest and in theirs to align and make the show successful."

MBS will be the official hotel and venue of ITB for three years from next year. It hosted ITB last year when Suntec – home to ITB since the show's inception in 2008 – underwent modernisation works. With the five-year contract up, ITB Asia reopened the bid.

"Suntec has always provided us with an optimal business environment but we believe that our partnership with MBS will provide delegates with a more convenient and integrated experience," said Nino Gruettke, ITB Asia's executive director.

He also said Suntec could not ensure the availability of additional space for the next three years.

Suntec's CEO, Arun Madhok, said the centre has not lost events due to renovations – ITB is looking for more space to grow beyond the space available at Suntec (42,000m²).

"We are seeing a high level of bookings well into next year and

beyond," he said, the line-up of which will be disclosed soon.

Meanwhile, this year is a record year for MBS in hosting 70 tradeshows, from 51 last year.

"A lot of that is due to our approach of looking at organisers as partners, not just buy-space," Mims said. "As well, we've been opened three years, the operations team is doing a phenomenal job and we hear from clients that when they have meetings here, more people attend because they like the venue, Singapore, etc."

There still is room for growth in terms of event space at MBS, he said, but in terms of occupancy, MBS is full, with MICE guests making up 20 per cent. Latest full third-quarter report ending September shows a 99.8 per cent occupancy, and an average daily rate of US\$401, an 11 per cent rise over the same period 2012.

Mims said it is likely MBS as official ITB Asia hotel will offer a special delegate rate.

Helfer makes a case for proper tourism investment

By Raini Hamdi

DESTINATIONS in Asia-Pacific must get investment principles correct from the start – or end up with white elephants or non-sustainable developments.

Richard Helfer, opening the two-day Asia Pacific Tourism Destination Investment (APTDI) Conference yesterday, warned against such pitfalls as creating copy-cat tourism attractions or using cultural/historic sites, natural habitats as "low-hanging fruit" waiting to be exploited.

"We...have often seen what the lack of master planning for tourism destinations, inconsistent policy frameworks and non-time sensitive approval processes have done to discourage innovative and visionary development concepts," said Helfer, chairman, RCH International, who has overseen many tourism investments. "Without such solid and consistent foundations, it becomes nearly impossible to attract and sustain over the longer-term the necessary investment capital, in particular the desirable combination of destination-based and regional/international stakeholder financial support. As we have all seen, if the first tranche of investment does not reach its promised volumes and ROI, there is lessened support for the vision going forward, as well as limited or no fresh funding for the later phases."

"We further see the lack of end-user support as to word-of-mouth and/or return visits when the tourism destinations are

not properly planned or maintained."

Greater Asia and Oceania have a most varied collection of both rural and urban natural destinations offering investment opportunities in infrastructure and individual venues, he pointed out.

"Of the world's total population of seven billion people, about 60 per cent live in Greater Asia & Oceania. Over the past decade, close to 60 per cent of the entire world's population



Helfer (far right) with Fashion Hotels' Dinis Madaleno and VinaCapital's Craig Douglas

increase has also come from this region. Greater Asia/Oceania accounts for 21 per cent of global spending and, whereas in 2011, 23 per cent of the world's arrivals were in Greater Asia and Oceania; by 2030 this number will increase to 30 per cent.

"Making the case for tourism infrastructure investment in our region, whether by country or individual destination, therefore, is a most positive proposition."

Trend watch

1 No more free data

At the opening of Web in Travel Conference yesterday, global strategist and author, Parag Khanna, drew attention to a new movement among "digital slaves" who are realising they are providing "free labour" to companies which use their data to build money-spinning businesses.

Championing this is virtual reality pioneer Jaron Lanier, who calls for "something like a digital marxist uprising," said Khanna.

"(The idea is) how are you as a data aggregator going to compensate me for knowing how many minutes I spend on a website and selling it?"

"Individuals will use tools to block their data from being shared and sold without them being compensated."

2 Global citizenship

Khanna's suggestion of a global passport may seem like an impractical one, but it is nonetheless food for thought.

Those who are willing to submit their biometric data and to a background check would get a passport that allows travel to participating countries, divorcing identity from nationality, he explained. – Gracia Chiang



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Who's most illustrious here

AT the 2013 Singapore Experience Awards gala ceremony Monday evening, Robert Khoo, former CEO of the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore Group, was accorded the Lifetime Achievement for Outstanding Contribution to Tourism award.

Olivier Bendel, CEO of Delicacie Hospitality Management, whose nine concept restaurants include Canteen by Bruno Menard (the only three Michelin star chef in Singapore) and the third L'Entrecôte at Suntec City Mall, which just opened, was recognised as Tourism Entrepreneur of the Year.

Perry Shum, founding member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers Photonics Society, was named Business Event Ambassador for his strong advocacy of Singapore's MICE industry and significant contribution in anchoring key global conferences in Singapore.

The Breakthrough Contribution to Tourism was given to Gardens by the Bay, for bringing a new level of innovation to Singapore's tourism offerings and cementing Singapore's unique positioning as a city in a garden.

Resort stirs at last

Stalled Mandalika Resort development work in Lombok will start

By Mimi Hudoyo

THE long-overdue development of the Mandalika Resort in Lombok will finally kick off with road construction in the 400-hectare first phase development, starting in November.

Developed and managed by Bali Tourism Development Corporation (BTDC), the Mandalika Resort project covers a total area of 1,175 hectares and will be developed in three stages, with a target to complete by 2020.

The US\$233.2 million road construction project in the first phase will finish in August 2014.

Come June 2014, the construction of solar cell electricity and telecommunication facilities will start, as will three hotels and an 18-hole golf course designed by Robert Trent 2.

BTDC director of development, Edwin Darmasetiawan, said: "The development of the hotels will start with Club Med and Marriott Vacations, both with large membership bases. Kicking off projects such as these, we hope to be able to start building traffic."

Apart from the two hotels, BTDC will build a 150-room mid-scale hotel in the area, marking the first hotel it owns, which will be run by an international hotel operator. Also in the pipeline are two other five-range properties in Senggigi... the accommodation there (at the resort) will range from mid- to upmarket, which will be built at a later stage."

Designed to be eco-friendly and event-based, Mandalika Resort will also at a later stage develop theme parks and a concert hall.

Darmasetiawan said: "We do not want to compete with Bali's products. We need to create something different. Bali is attracting big conferences and is famous for its culture. In Lombok, we would like to attract travellers through contemporary concerts and performances, as well as theme parks."

Also on the cards is the development of a cruise port in Mandalika.

"We have a memorandum of understanding with Pelindo (Indonesian port operator) to develop the port. There is also a plan to develop a jetty in the Nusa Dua area in Bali to enable a connection between the two resorts by sea," said Darmasetiawan.

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Feedback

Thailand's entry tax issue

THE Thai government's plan to levy a 500 baht (US\$16) entry tax on foreigners has been strongly criticised by the travel trade for being poorly thought out and possibly a ploy to recover lost revenue for granting visa-free travel to Chinese tourists.

Aparna Basumallik, CEO of Club 7 Holidays with offices in Mumbai, Baroda, New Delhi and Bengaluru, said the Indian MICE market is extremely sensitive and can result in companies changing destinations.

Another buyer, Rashmi Chotmarada, managing director of Noida-based Touch of Class Travels, said Thailand has positioned itself as a cheap, cost-friendly destination and the levy would change travellers' perception of this. She added: "I foresee at least a 20 per cent drop in outbound travel to Thailand if this is implemented."

Jebsen partners Westminster

By S Puvaneswary

KUALA Lumpur-based Jebsen Travel & Tour Services and Hong Kong-based Westminster Travel will partner to develop the cruise business in Hong Kong.

Jebsen's managing director, Lim Chee Tong, said his company will provide the expertise to Westminster to operate a cruise department and sell all 50 cruise lines which Jebsen currently represents.

This is Jebsen's first business dealing in Hong Kong and the company will also provide training to travel agents in Hong Kong on the know-how of selling cruises.

Lim said the cruise market in Hong Kong is a mature one, second to Japan, and as such, he anticipated a conservative growth of 10 per cent in the first year of operation.

He added: "We believe the luxury cruise segment in Hong Kong is big and it is growing for both leisure and incentive travellers. The timing is also right to expand our business in Asia, as we anticipate a few more cruise ships to be stationed in Asia permanently by the end of 2014, joining the three main players here – Costa Cruises, Royal Caribbean International and Star Cruises."

Jebsen also has joint ventures with various cruise partners overseas and has offices in India, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, China, Japan, South Korea and Oman.

The company was set up in 1979. Among the 50 cruise lines it represents are Poseidon Expeditions, Oceania Cruises, Orion Expedition Cruises, Crystal Cruises, Costa Cruises, Viking Cruises and Disney Cruise Line.

Wotif's comeback ploy

Blume attempts Asian turnaround with new dynamic packaging, marketing bash

By Gracia Chiang

WOTIF Group is hoping to turn around its underperforming Asia business with yesterday's launch of dynamic Asian packages on Wotif.com targeting Australian outbound as well as a new marketing campaign to be rolled out next month for its two brands in the region, Asia Web Direct and LateStays.com.

Managing director and group CEO, Scott Blume, who took over the reins of the company earlier this year, said: "We need to get back to where we were. Asia was down 20 per cent last year (in room nights)."

The strategy is two-pronged: wooing existing Australian customers who currently don't use Wotif for their outbound travel to Asia while increasing the group's share of intra-Asian travel by ramping up investment in its two brands here.

Wotif.com's new dynamic packaging technology went live



Blume: need to be back on track

and international packages may include flights, hotels and transfers.

Said Blume: "We know there's a market for us. Australians, particularly those travelling short-haul to all the standard Asia destinations, are very comfortable buying a package. They are not so sensitive about which hotel they stay at."

"Our DNA and history are around domestic hotels, and that strength will continue. But as proven with flights (total transaction value is expected to increase by more than 30 per cent

yesterday, building on the success of its theatre package offered in Australia. Combining land and air components, domestic

over the first half of the prior year), our subscribers trust us. If we can serve relevant content, it's a natural fit for us."

When asked if he saw a slowdown in outbound this year due to the weakened economy, Blume said Australians are still travelling, adding that even the offline players are not witnessing cutbacks.

The company is continuing to build its inventory in Asia, where it currently already works with around 9,000 hotels.

"We've got people on the ground throughout all the key cities in Asia who can get the content for us directly...In cities where we are weak, like in Japan, we've done the Rakuten (content sharing) deal. Nine of the top 20 destinations that Australians travel outbound to are in Asia," explained Blume, singling out Bali, Phuket, Koh Samui, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, Wotif is also in-

creasing its hotel commission rate, allowing it "to reinvest in the business". Blume said that despite moving from 11 to 12 per cent, the OTA is still charging "significantly less than the global guys".

As for its new marketing plan in Asia, Blume would not disclose details due to competitive reasons but revealed that the increase in budget was significant, about "several hundred thousand dollars".

To gain access to more Asian customers, Wotif is partnering companies such as DiGi in Malaysia, allowing it to market products to the mobile phone operator's 10 million subscribers.

Other areas that the company wants to invest in are mobile, which has seen exponential growth and customer adoption over the last two years. The channel now provides 33 per cent of all traffic across the group.

Sound bites

"I'm skeptical how we implement green initiatives. There's a lot of hypocrisy today. A lot of buildings in Singapore tell you they are green; the only thing that's green is the colour."

Ong Chih Ching
Chairman
KPO Properties



Take a leaf from this booth



Marina Bay Sands (MBS) is walking the talk on its environmentally responsible philosophy with the debut of its green booth at ITB Asia that can be used for three years.

The booth is created from costly sturdy materials, but MBS believes overall cost savings can be enjoyed when the investment is spread out over three years, as compared to building a booth from scratch each year.

Further, to reduce paper consumption, thumbdrives instead of brochures and printed material will be given out at the booth to interested parties.

Park opens sales office in emerging markets

By Gracia Chiang

SINGAPORE-based Park Hotel Group is moving in to capitalise on emerging markets, with Global Sales Offices (GSOs) to open in India and Indonesia within the next two months.

Speaking to *TTG Show Daily*, Park Hotel Group CEO, Allen Law, said India and Indonesia each accounts for under 10 per cent of business.

"Our traditional markets like US and Europe have been quite stable, while there has been high growth in Asia," said Law, adding that Vietnam, Cambodia and South Korea are also showing promise.

Park Hotel Group currently has eight GSOs in Sydney, London, Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Having also launched its own private label GDS chain code earlier this year, Law said this has given the company more brand recognition in the GDS and TMC space, allowing it to tailor communications to agencies and customers "that may be very far from where our hotels are".

Over the next six months, Park intends to make several announcements, one of which is a new three-star brand to complement its luxury and upscale brands of Grand Park and Park Hotel respectively.

Law said there has been interest in the mid-tier brand, which

would be launched in Singapore and Hong Kong.

The sale of two of its hotels this year – Park Hotel Clarke Quay and Grand Park Orchard – has also given the group around S\$1.5 billion (US\$1.2 billion) in funds, which it is looking for the right opportunity to deploy.

"For direct investment, we're focusing on mainly Hong Kong and Singapore. And for hotel management, we're about to announce projects in Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia within the next six months or so," said Law.

He revealed that the current operating environment in China is challenging for its three hotels in Kunming, Wuxi and Xian due to an oversupply and government austerity measures coupled with rising costs as a result of inflation.

"Our profit margin is being squeezed. It will probably take another two years for the supply to be absorbed. The price war is not healthy," said Law.

To entice event organisers/bookers globally, Park's hotels in China are currently promoting a Gourmet MICE package. With minimum reservations of 20 room nights at any one of the three hotels, organisers will get complimentary half-day or full-day use of the meeting room. A 10 per cent discount on the hotel's gourmet menu is also available for all bookings.



Law: new three star brand



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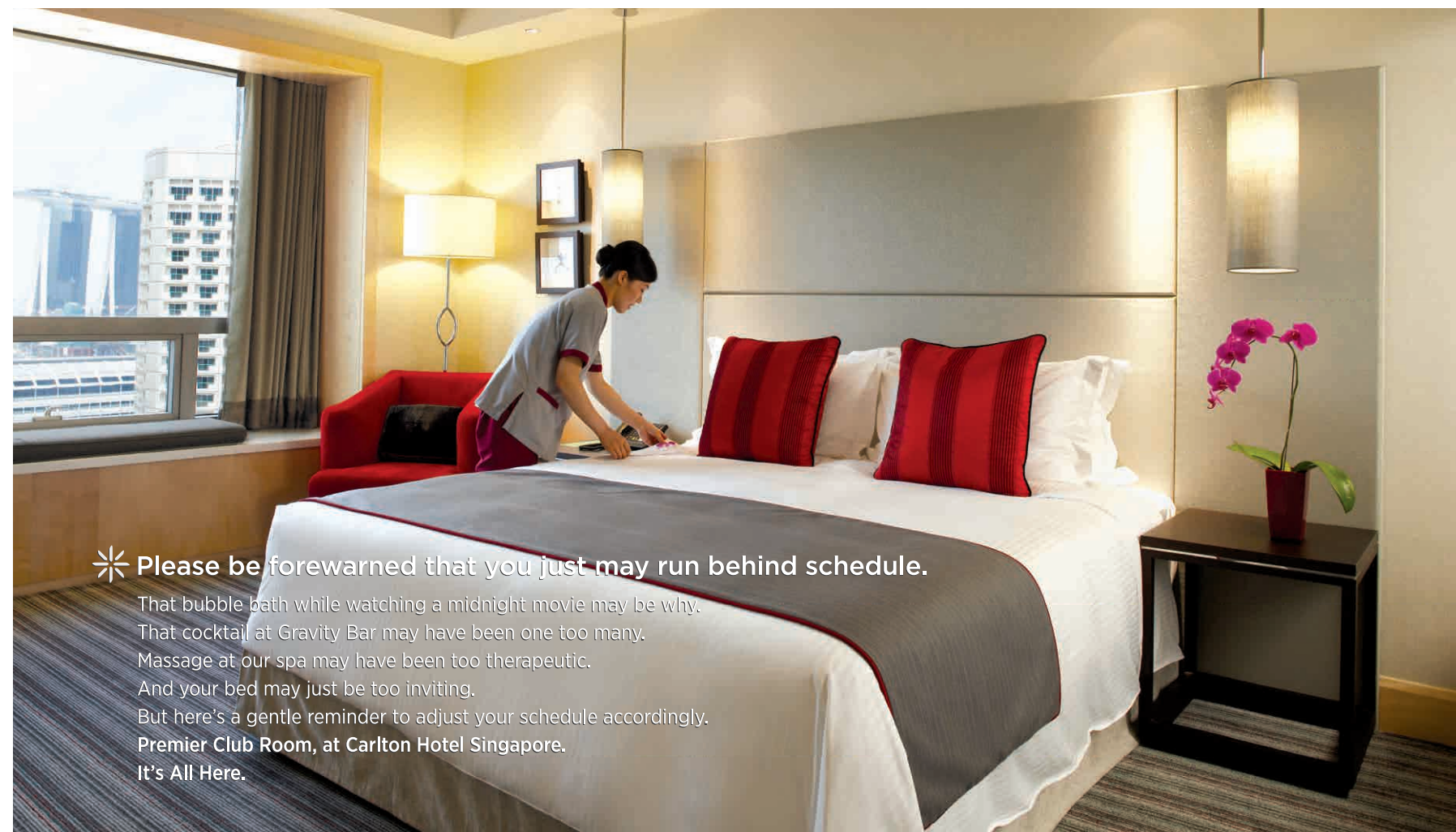
At the individual destination level, 16 countries (see Exhibit 1) have produced consistent growth over the same period since 2010, as measured by the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR).

The strong CAGR for each of these destinations highlights strength in the medium-term development of travel and tourism. In the immediate term, the annual growth rates in both percentage terms and volume gains become significant in as much as they indicate present performance. In this respect, and based on percentage gains, year-to-date 2013 over 2012, the fastest growing destinations are as follows:



Destination	Analysed months	Arrivals	CAGR (%)
Myanmar	January-May	326,574	36.7
Thailand	January-June	12,744,374	19.0
Cambodia	January-March	611,160	18.0
Vanuatu	January-May	142,824	17.7
Bhutan	January-April	14,195	17.2
Sri Lanka	January-June	438,500	16.3
Laos	January-March	998,191	16.2
Hong Kong	January-May	21,164,522	14.1
Philippines	January-March	1,271,579	13.2
Vietnam	January-July	4,207,940	12.9
Nepal	January-June	282,429	12.9
Maldives	January-June	539,667	12.1
Taiwan	January-June	3,805,506	11.7
Singapore	January-June	7,616,225	11.3

Destination	Analysed months	YTD growth		
		2013	%	Volume
Myanmar	January-May	326,574	45.0	101,299
Japan	January-June	4,954,611	22.5	909,438
Niue	January-March	798	20.9	138
Thailand	January-June	12,744,374	20.0	2,125,031
Cambodia	January-March	611,160	19.0	97,404
Maldives	January-June	539,667	17.8	81,599
Malaysia	January-March	6,449,398	15.9	886,860
Laos	January-March	998,191	15.0	130,436
Turkey	January-June	14,549,641	14.3	1,825,663
Hong Kong	January-May	21,164,522	13.2	2,462,680
Papua New Guinea	January-April	59,919	12.7	6,750
Philippines	January-March	1,271,579	10.8	123,507



* Please be forewarned that you just may run behind schedule.

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Vietnam registered a 12.9 per cent CAGR between the first seven months of 2010 and the same period this year; Halong Bay pictured here

Volume gains have also been included to give some perspective on what a percentage gain translates into. The counter to this series is a similar listing, but based on volume growth period-to-period between 2012 and 2013 rather than percentage gain, and this is shown in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3: Top Asia-Pacific destinations with YOY volume gains (YTD) in excess of 100,000

Destination	Analysed months	%	Volume
Hong Kong	January-May	13.2	2,462,680
Thailand	January-June	20.0	2,125,031
Turkey	January-June	14.3	1,825,663
Japan	January-June	22.5	909,438
Malaysia	January-March	15.9	886,860
Macau	January-June	4.2	564,526
Singapore	January-June	7.5	533,893
Vietnam	January-July	9.9	378,512
Taiwan	January-June	6.4	229,055
Hawaii	January-June	5.5	212,178
South Korea	January-June	3.7	196,857
Indonesia	January-May	5.8	184,105
Laos	January-March	15.0	130,436
Australia	January-June	4.4	127,030
Philippines	January-March	10.8	123,507
Myanmar	January-May	45.0	101,299

Once again it is essential to recognise that not all destinations have submitted data for the same period and as such cannot be compared against each other; however, it is interesting to compare the relationship between percentage growth and volume gains over each respective destination for its own relevant period.

Following PATA's decision to align its boundary structure with that of the UN Country Classification Code, countries in

Central and West Asia as well as Central and South America are now included in the Asia-Pacific equation. Turkey, which is included for the first time here, will begin to appear in some of the following listings. In understanding the region's 2013 year-to-date performance, the key lies in determining which source markets are generating most of this growth. Many of the destinations covered in this report produce only aggregate counts throughout the year. In moving to a disaggregated

listing of origin markets we lose about 10 per cent of the volume. Nevertheless, available data has been treated in such a way as to ensure a balanced comparison. The first thing to note is that the ubiquitous 'Other Countries' arrival category, whose numbers appear disproportionately large when aggregated across the various destinations in the region. This category has generated more than 11 million international arrivals so far this year, suggesting that some destinations may

need to consider expanding their arrival categories soon. This should be considered for the ASEAN bloc so that the same subset of origin markets for each member economy is covered in a standardised way. Origin markets that generate the greatest additional volume of arrivals are shown in the exhibits that follow. In addition, the exhibits have been reduced to represent each of the PATA sub-regions, so as to give a more applicable regional perspective.

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Malaysia (Petronas Twin Tower above), along with other South-east Asian destinations, are seeing more arrivals from Belgium, Brazil, Argentina and Ukraine

Exhibit 4: Top 10 generating markets to the Americas by YOY volume increases (YTD)

Origin	Volume	
	YTD 2013	Gain 2013/2012
US	5,172,867	134,812
Colombia	91,170	24,195
China	118,406	20,591
Bolivia	138,483	20,123
Russia	40,075	11,179
Venezuela	46,138	10,281
Japan	102,575	6,133
Peru	152,349	6,028
Chile	31,359	4,216
Sweden	39,776	4,210

Note: Destinations for which 2013 year-to-date data is available include Canada, Chile and Mexico

Clearly, intra-regional activity is significant for this cluster of destinations. However, Asian source markets are becoming increasingly significant as evidenced by growth from China and Japan (see Exhibit 4). A similar reliance on intra-regional activity is also shown by the destinations in North-east Asia. More than half of the origin markets into North-east Asia are from Asian source markets (see Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5: Top generating markets to North-east Asia by YOY volume increases (YTD)

Origin	Volume	
	YTD 2013	Gain 2013/2012
China	31,229,624	4,583,569
South Korea	3,667,948	133,561

Vietnam	767,818	113,533
Thailand	1,118,807	95,386
India	747,533	60,135
Philippines	1,300,852	35,453
Indonesia	830,421	23,524
France	497,501	20,128
Nepal	31,500	14,600
North Korea	99,100	10,300

Note: Destinations for which 2013 year-to-date data is available include Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Macau

Data for South Asia does not include India because disaggregated data was not available at press time. Nevertheless, the relative importance of Asia as a source of international arrivals is certainly obvious – these markets have generated a year-to-date volume increase of 86,000 for South Asia (see Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6: Top 10 generating markets to South Asia by YOY volume increases (YTD)

Origin	Volume	
	YTD 2013	Gain 2013/2012
China	189,407	64,578
Russia	59,861	9,164
US	50,287	8,149
Maldives	27,336	6,734
Australia	40,614	6,062
Malaysia	21,732	5,805
UK	115,260	4,530
Japan	42,459	3,174
Thailand	14,309	2,920

Philippines	6,851	2,918
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Note: Destinations for which 2013 year-to-date data is available include Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka

Arrivals into South-east Asia is showing interesting developments, with Belgium appearing in the top 10 list along with Brazil, Argentina and Ukraine. Although these markets churn out comparatively smaller volumes, there is growth nonetheless, which makes them the ones to watch for in the future (see Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7: Top 10 generating markets to South-east Asia by YOY volume increases (YTD)

Origin	Volume	
	YTD 2013	Gain 2013/2012
China	4,234,775	577,895
Singapore	3,745,476	573,577
Russia	1,016,618	224,846
Brunei	339,561	8,978
Belgium	62,359	6,464
Laos	592,892	5,940
Brazil	22,035	3,283
Argentina	16,941	2,192
Sweden	272,533	1,052
Ukraine	3,260	700

Note: Destinations for which 2013 year-to-date data is available include Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam

Although only Turkey is included in the following analysis on West Asia’s inbound numbers (see Exhibit 8), this will change over time as more data becomes accessible from other markets in the West Asia sub-region.

Exhibit 8: Top generating markets to West Asia by YOY volume increases (YTD)

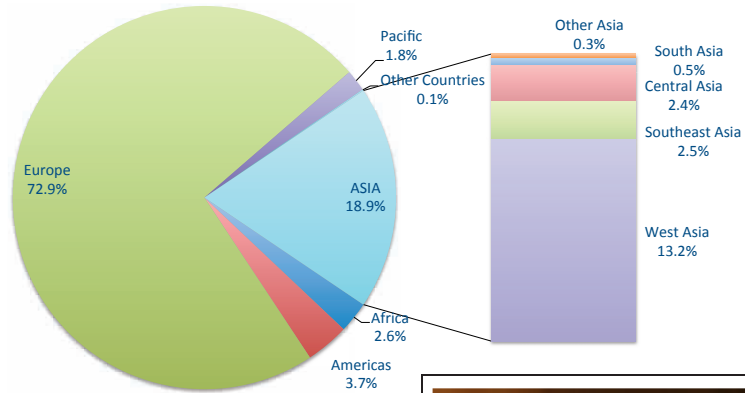
Origin	Volume	
	YTD 2013	Gain 2013/2012
Syria	663,772	379,521
Russia	1,695,151	265,192
Georgia	804,582	214,643
Iraq	272,226	79,459
Germany	1,989,620	65,512
Bulgaria	707,842	60,930
Ukraine	325,209	55,608
Netherlands	528,327	45,547
Italy	296,167	38,148
Sweden	287,057	38,128

The composition of foreign arrivals into Turkey for 1H2013 may be dominated by Europe, but there is also a strong mix out of Asia (see Exhibit 9). As more access corridors come on line, we expect stronger Asian inbound to West Asia, and vice versa.

The US and several Asian markets are emerging as important source markets for Pacific destinations such as Hawaii; Honolulu pictured below



Exhibit 9: Proportion of foreign arrivals into Turkey, 1H2013



Source: Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism

While intra-regional traffic to the 13 destinations in the Pacific sub-region remains significant, especially for many of the smaller Pacific island nations, the role of the US and parts of Asia is becoming increasingly important (see Exhibit 10).

Exhibit 10: Top generating markets to the Pacific by YOY volume increases (YTD)

Origin	Volume	
	YTD 2013	Gain 2013/2012
US	2,971,002	142,637
China	627,524	121,246
South Korea	369,024	46,719
Japan	1,409,268	46,011
Australia	816,783	38,775
Singapore	189,425	21,117
UK	435,030	9,313
Hong Kong	112,626	7,894
Germany	130,768	6,867
Philippines	52,363	5,591

Note: Destinations for which 2013 year-to-date data is available include Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Guam, Hawaii, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tahiti and Vanuatu

Over the earlier months of 2013, the US and Asia have collectively generated more than 5.7 million arrivals to the Pacific destinations and improved the inbound count by more than 390,000 additional arrivals, relative to the corresponding period of 2012.

For these destinations to truly tap what appears to be surging demand from Asia, they must reconcile their product and experience offerings with the desires of Asian travellers.



Asia contributes 18.9 per cent of foreign arrivals into Turkey; Istanbul's iconic Blue Mosque pictured here



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Discover Love



PARK HOTEL GROUP

Our favourite Singapore

TTG Asia's editors spill the beans on the best haunts for fun and food in the city



From left: Gillman Barracks, Food Playground, Haji Lane



Karen Yue
Group Editor

➔ Must see

Peranakan Museum

I adore museums, as they enrich the mind and are at most times quiet and dignified. But if you think museums are a drab, then the Peranakan Museum may just change your mind. Just as how the Peranakans are a loud, lively and expressive people, the museum exhibits are a feast for the senses.

Keep your eyes peeled for the museum's extensive collection of exquisite porcelain ware, ranging from dining sets to vases, which are brightly painted with favoured designs of plump peonies and auspicious dragons and phoenixes, as well as intriguing sections that detail wedding and funeral rituals.

The Peranakan Museum opens daily from 10.00 to 19.00, with the exception of Friday when it closes at 21.00. Admission costs S\$6 (US\$5) per adult, although a joint ticket that includes the Asian Civilisations Museum is available at S\$11.

➔ Must do

Food Playground As its name suggests, Food Playground is a place for one to have fun with, well, food. Led by managing director Daniel Tan and a business partner, Food Playground introduces tourists and locals alike to Singapore's rich culinary culture through lively market tours and engaging cooking classes that impart the art of whipping up popular local dishes. The latter is conducted in a well-furnished studio in an beautiful old-generation shophouse in Tanjong Pagar.

I was hardly surprised when Food Playground was voted best attraction in Singapore by users of TripAdvisor. I did two activities there – once with my husband for a nutrition class and another with TTG Asia Media's publishing team for a team-building affair – and was bowled over on both occasions by the enthusiasm of Food Playground's staff and the high quality of

cooking implements used in the studio.

For someone who is often lost and terrified in the kitchen, Food Playground actually made cooking oh so fun!

➔ Must eat

Joe Pork Porridge One of the many food stalls that inhabit the second floor of Chinatown Complex Market, Joe Pork Porridge has been serving up bowls of Cantonese-style porridge cooked to a smooth perfection for generations. Don't be fooled by its name though, as Joe Pork Porridge offers a variety of other meats, sourced daily from the market downstairs.

While I love the sliced fish porridge and vermicelli here, my one true addiction is the raw fish salad which I savour in copious amounts every Saturday and Sunday morning as long as I am not on assignment overseas. Drenched in a top secret dressing, which I suspect comprises premium sesame oil, and garnished with deep fried shallots, fresh ginger strips, chopped spring onions and sliced Bird's eye chili, this raw fish salad is truly some kind of wonderful.

Joe Pork Porridge opens daily from 07.00 to 13.00.



Gracia Chiang,
Deputy Group Editor

➔ Must see

Gillman Barracks

The once-sleepy colonial barracks south of Singapore is transforming itself into a mecca for contemporary art lovers. Galleries have arrived in droves, showcasing the boundary-pushing works of local and international artists the likes of Ai Weiwei and Keiichi Tanaami. Whether you're looking for a decorative piece to take home or just needing a dose of whimsical creativity, you'll find it splashed across various mediums such as film, sculpture and painting. Visit www.gillmanbarracks.com for the ever-chang-

ing line-up of exhibitions.

The weary-footed can also take a breather at one of three dining outlets. For something fancy, Masons offers European cuisine in a stylish black-and-white setting, while more casual seafood bites can be had at The Naked Finn, which also serves up bespoke cocktails. Come sundown, Timbre is the place to be with its live music performances.

➔ Must do

Marine Life Park Resorts World Sentosa's latest jewel is an educational experience for all ages. Touted as the world's largest oceanarium, catch the over 800 species of marine animals that call the SEA Aquarium home including giant manta rays, electrifying sea jellies and colourful reef fishes. My favourite part was watching the playful bottlenose dolphins show off their diving prowess. Starting this month, guests can wade with the social creatures or explore their underwater habitat as part of a new interaction programme. Alternatively, the brave can join the Shark Encounter experience, which allows participants to come face to face with hammerheads from the safety of an acrylic enclosure.

Marine Life Park also encompasses the Adventure Cove Waterpark, where the more adrenaline-seeking can have a go at six water slides or splash around in the wave pool.

➔ Must eat

PasarBella I've been to PasarBella at the former Turf City several times in just a few months, and I'm nowhere done exploring its endless options. Bringing together established and niche F&B operators under one roof, think European food hall meets farmers' market.

Pop-up stalls like one dishing out crackling pork roast can get snaking queues, so be sure to arrive early to avoid being disappointed when it sells out. Wash this down with craft brews from The Great Beer Experiment or round off your

meal with a cuppa from The 1872 Clipper Tea Co or a jolt of java at Dutch Colony Coffee Co. There are also no lack of dessert options: take macarons of all flavours, towering carrot cakes and caramel butter salt crepes, for instance.

It is not just all food though. A wide range of organic products are available, while other retailers include a floral studio and a kitchenware store.



Raini Hamdi
Senior Editor

➔ Must see

National Orchid Garden

I urged you to see it last year and, in case you didn't make it to our National Orchid Garden then, here is another nudge.

Where else can you see more than 1,000 species and 2,000 hybrids of orchids under one roof and marvel at the design of orchids which, shall we say, are "hand-made" by the Gardens' horticultural staff, dedicated to bringing out the finest in any hybrid cross?

Trust me, you'll have a blooming good time there, even if you're not into orchids or gardens.

National Orchid Garden sits within Singapore Botanic Gardens and is open daily from 08.30 to 19.00. Last ticket sales at 18.00.

➔ Must do

Haji Lane It's the most unlikely thing to have happened but this old, non-event, conservation lane near the biggest mosque in Singapore, Sultan Mosque, has become something of a fashionista paradise and a cool place to hang out thanks to trendy cafes and bars there and in Arab Street which runs parallel to it. Check out the quirky boutiques boasting Made-in-Singapore designs by young local designers, then head to Arab Street which has textile shops that have been in business since the 1950s.



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From left: Live Turtle and Tortoise Museum, Kaya toast, Singapore Zoo

➤ Must eat

&Made by Bruno Menard Must eat this devil of a mini gourmet burger, hand-made by the only three Michelin star chef in Singapore, Bruno Menard, who conceptualised his first restaurant in the city as a non-fanciful, non-Michelin star prices outlet conveniently located on Scotts Road, near Orchard Road. He's gone completely opposite – ditched the formal degustation menu that tends to leave one hungry at the end, for wholesome salads, burgers and sandwiches using high-quality produce. You can even craft your own version of the Perfect Burger from a list of five meats, 11 sauces, four types of cheeses and 10 accessories.

The restaurant is located on 9 Scotts Road, Pacific Plaza #01-04/06; Tel: (65) 6690-7566

toise Museum. Little known even among locals, the museum is tucked away in the far end of Chinese Garden and holds the Guinness World Record for the largest collection of tortoises and turtles at 3,456 creatures, including over 1,000 live specimens, according to the billboard leading to the attraction.

A mere S\$5 will buy you entry into the compound and a couple of dollars more will equip you with fresh vegetables and/or food pellets, which you can feed to the compound's inhabitants, some of whom are allowed to amble about freely. Watching the little ones rush (or waddle, as they are tortoises) over and devour their meal will warm your heart, while observing the misshapen shells of turtles who have suffered at the hands of abusive owners serves as a reminder of the importance of protecting animal welfare.

and their eventual influence on the country's development.

Chinatown is a bustling, colourful neighbourhood of old and new, from family-run jewellery shops selling hand-crafted gold pieces and medicine halls, to textile stores and traditional eateries.

Watch out for a number of conserved pre-war shophouses that have been painted over with cheerful colours and drawings. Be sure to bring your camera along!

➤ Must do

Pulau Ubin Slip back in time to 1960s Singapore on the laidback island of Pulau Ubin, where the city-state's last villages still call home.

Pulau Ubin presents a stark contrast to the modern infrastructure and facilities on the mainland, and much of the native flora and fauna can still be found.

The best way to explore this rural island's natural habitat and local villages is on a humble bicycle – easily available for rent from shops.

➤ Must eat

Chin Mee Chin Coffee Shop Touted as one of the last few old-school coffee shops in Singapore, Chin Mee Chin Coffee Shop on East Coast Road evokes a sense of nostalgia. Its interior comes complete with mosaic floor tiles, sturdy wooden table with marble tops – a style that harks back to the 1960s.

Not to be missed here are the crispy toasts slathered with *kaya*, a rich and fragrant coconut jam. Pair these *kaya* toasts with half-boiled eggs and coffee – made the traditional way with a humble but most effective cloth filter – and you will have a breakfast of local champions.



Kathy Neo
Copy Editor

➤ Must see

Singapore Zoo For me, the zoo is an occasional retreat from the concrete city. This 26-hectare wildlife park nestled within the lush Mandai rainforest is beautiful and relaxing, the animals uncaged and allowed to roam freely in specially created naturalistic habitats.

Hardly an early riser, I would make an exception for my favourite activity here – the *Jungle Breakfast with Wildlife* programme, where I can enjoy a

scrumptious international buffet in the company of the very adorable orang utans. I especially love watching these creatures move about in close-knit family groups, and am always amazed at their human-like loving parent-child relationship.

➤ Must do

Residential neighbourhood walk

How special can an overseas trip be without any attempt to explore the local life? Even for me as a Singaporean, I enjoy strolling around different residential neighbourhoods. There are many housing estates in Singapore where the majority of locals reside, some estates older than others, but each is a "satellite town" self-sufficient in food, supplies, facilities and other day-to-day services.

My own in Toa Payoh, for instance, is one of the earliest developed following the country's independence in 1965. I enjoy regular meals at the countless coffee shops; go to the stadium or the age-old Toa Payoh Garden for walks; buy groceries from any of the two local supermarkets, FairPrice; and hide in a cosy corner in the public library with my nose in magazines.

When I'm less lazy, I'll take the MRT to Bishan, another vibrant neighbourhood just two stops away. That is why though Singapore is small, it has never been boring for me. Come join me.

➤ Must eat

Serangoon Gardens Food Centre

This age-old hawker centre, also affectionately known among Singaporeans as Chomp Chomp, is my favourite. I would literally chomp my way through the plethora of food stalls on every visit, as if possessed by the hungry ghost.

It is wise to come here with a couple of friends, because that's how you can order a good variety of local dishes to share and have the best of all worlds, at very affordable prices.

Without fail, my mates and I would order fried Hokkien noodles, oyster omelette, fried carrot cake, pork porridge, barbecued chicken wings and grilled stingray. Of course, not forgetting the sugarcane drink – a must-have for any local hawker feast. We would each order a large serving of this chilled, sweet beverage with a slice of lemon, which is uniquely served here in a receptacle I consider a bucket.

It helps a lot that Serangoon Gardens Food Centre is clean and well ventilated.



Hannah Koh
Assistant Editor, TTG Asia Online

➤ Must see

Stand-up comedies The world's most emotionless country appears to be developing a sense of humour, if the proliferation and popularity of comedy clubs in recent years are anything to go by.

Founded in 2007, the Singapore chapter of Comedy Club Asia now runs open mic sessions at Blu Jaz Café on Wednesdays (S\$10 per person) and regularly hosts a slew of international comedians at night-life venues around the island (S\$50 per person at the door), including Imran Yusuf from the UK, who's been featured on Michael MacIntyre's Comedy Roadshow, and Papa CJ, hailed as the face of cutting-edge Indian stand-up comedy. For a dose of local humour, watch for the big names in Singapore such as drag queen Kumar who occasionally deigns to crack his wit at a Comedy Club performance.

Alternatively, check out Comedy Masala on Tuesday nights at Home Club, which has been the launchpad for many a local jester. Comedy Masala was founded by Pakistani comedian Rana Umar, who hosted Emmy-nominated actor and Saturday Night Live veteran Rob Schneider's stopover show in Singapore in 2010. Admission costs S\$10.

➤ Must eat

Geylang Famous Beef Kway Teow

Geylang is often billed as the seedy underbelly of Singapore for its red-light credentials, but most locals who head there are more concerned with satiating a different sort of appetite. The *lorongs* (lanes in the Malay language) of Geylang are filled with low-key eateries serving an array of affordable local food, with tables even spilling out into back alleys for an al fresco dining experience almost.

I strongly recommend getting down and dirty at the unabashedly named Geylang Famous Beef Kway Teow on Lorong 9. Not only does it serve up a steamy beef *kway teow* (a flat rice noodle) laden with juicy beef slices and coated in a savoury, slippery gravy, the shop also sells a full range of other Chinese dishes like *ngor hiang* (five-spice pork rolls), crunchy stir-fried vegetables and fried rice.

After dinner, explore the surrounding *lorongs* for dessert. You'll find one of the best soya bean curd in Singapore here, or if you're feeling a little adventurous, you'll also find a wealth of durian stalls lining the streets with rickety tables for you to tuck into the king of fruit's creamy flesh right then and there.



Lee Pei Qi
Assistant Editor, Singapore

➤ Must see

Chinatown Here you have Singapore's largest historical district, which offers a peek into the city-state's first Chinese migrants

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Storefront seductions

The physical store remains a vital link for travel consultants to inspire clients and sell travel. By **Lee Pei Qi**



Travel agencies should integrate digital tools to evoke travellers' desire for a dream vacation

As travellers increasingly plan and book their holidays online, travel consultants can rise above the competition by offering a memorable holiday experience starting from their storefront, according to speakers at the Asia Fashion Summit 2013, which took place in Singapore in May.

Darren Watson, creative director of global design consultancy firm FITCH, said: "Most travellers today are using online as the default channel to look for everything from holiday inspiration and research to comparing prices and bookings to last-minute getaway bargains.

"Because this new technology is such an important catalyst for

seamless travel shopping, it has, understandably, taken front stage but (travel consultants) should not neglect their travel stores to ensure it remains enjoyable and memorable."

The physical element underscores every shopping experience, said Watson. "We all get excited about touching products we love, whether it's a mobile phone or a new dress. For travel retail, it is about making the non-tangible feel real," he added.

"Retailers should attract and engage customers at the front of the store, consider bringing dream destinations to life with a fully immersive and interactive postcard window and an en-

trance area based on a calendar of travel stories, placing the customers at the heart of the story."

Jennifer Fall, Asia brand director of Galeries Lafayette, also agreed on the customer-centric branding approach. "We create compelling in-store experiences which bring our customers into the stores away from the Internet.

"We arrange fashion shows that are graced and performed by our customers because we want to tell stories and sell them an experience beyond just the products."

Fall added: "The store is not dead yet and in fact it should have the most life because that

is the only place where human contact can still occur."

Aida Bayoud, vice president of retail at Value Retail Management China, concurred: "The Internet lacks the emotional aspect in the shopping experience."

"Instead of just promoting unique travel destinations, why not make use of your retail space to start off as a unique destination on its own already?" she asked.

Highlighting the example of STA Travel UK's new retail store concept for their global branch network, a project undertaken by FITCH, Watson said: "The store needed to reinvent the customer

cent uplift in sales across STA's network of stores.

As for ways to transform travel consultants' offices into unique destinations, Watson suggested: "A store can be curated to allow themed explorations, based on the type of trip or featured location – beach getaways, adventures, city breaks – each using the senses to bring them to life."

However, he conceded that there was no way a physical store could replicate the endless travel product selection available in an e-commerce shop. "Capitalise on the available visualisation

"Capitalise on visualisation technology to allow customers to build their dream holidays."

Darren Watson, creative director, FITCH



journey for a new generation of younger customers, to invite consumers into the space by allowing them to explore the possibilities of travel in-store."

The revamp resulted in a redesigned store with dynamic and playful spaces to put customers at ease and engage them. According to Watson, this new experience has led to a seven per

centage uplift in sales across STA's network of stores.

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However, he conceded that there was no way a physical store could replicate the endless travel product selection available in an e-commerce shop. "Capitalise on the available visualisation

Boom in Asian globe shoppers

By **Lee Pei Qi**

Chinese travellers have become the new darling of the global retail scene, especially as some 100 million Chinese tourists are expected to travel outside China by 2015, according to data from UNWTO.

Furthermore, the Chinese have been crowned the biggest spending nationality in 2012, accounting for 25 per cent of the value of all tax refund claims made, according to international tax refund company Global Blue.

Chinese travellers made more than three million transactions last year, a significant growth of 58 per cent from 2011.

Chinese travellers are developing a reputation as "keen shoppers" and they have earned the name of "big spenders" worldwide, according to Stefan Ellrott, country manager, Global Blue Singapore.

He said: "Chinese visitors are the most willing (travellers) to part with their money when it comes to overseas shopping. We refer to this group of visitors as globe shoppers because of the high priority they give to shop-

Top 10 globe shopper nations			
1	China	6	Thailand
2	Russia	7	Brazil
3	Japan	8	Taiwan
4	Indonesia	9	Switzerland
5	The US	10	Malaysia

Source: Global Blue

ping when travelling."

According to Ellrott, the average Chinese visitor to Singapore spends close to a staggering S\$18,000 (US\$14,052) per trip on shopping alone, spending largely on watches, jewellery, fashion and clothing.

Apart from China, several Asian countries are also on the to-watch list. According to Global Blue, Russians were the second highest spending nationality after the Chinese, while Japan and Indonesia came in third and fourth respectively. Meanwhile, Thailand and Malaysia joined the top 10 list for the first time in 2012.

It is estimated that more than 200 million tourists from the 10 globe shopper nations travel overseas each year, and globe shopping is becoming a larger and more important part of these travellers' itineraries.

Arjen Kruger, executive vice president at Global Blue, said: "The rise of the globe shopper is one of the most dramatic stories of the 21st century luxury goods landscape, not just in Europe but worldwide. For some manufacturers and retailers, globe shoppers, who on average spend four times more than local shoppers, are now considered the most important customer segment for

the business."

The top 10 globe shopper nations have some preferred destinations in common; all nationalities shopped heavily in at least some of the most popular tax-free shopping destinations: France, Italy, the UK, Germany and Singapore. Other favoured destinations include Finland, Austria, Spain, South Korea and Switzerland.

Ellrott said: "These are exciting times for the world's most popular shopping destinations that are set to receive the rapidly growing ranks of globe shoppers.

"For the travel (consultants), it will be a good time to tie up with retailers to do pre-travel marketing and woo these shoppers."



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Beijing without the crowds

Hotels are banking on the recent visa waiver to fill excess rooms, says **Prudence Lui**

Beijing has been seeing a downward trend in the number of foreign arrivals. For the first seven months of 2013, total overnight visitor numbers dropped 13.9 per cent to 2.5 million. Of this, 2.2 million were international visitors, which dropped 14.7 per cent.

The top five overseas markets were the US (431,441), South Korea (215,002), Hong Kong (197,353), Taiwan (140,000) and Japan (135,914). However, these source markets all indicated a fall in arrivals, particularly for the Japan market, which plunged as much as 53.7 per cent.

According to the Beijing Tourism Administration, as of June 2013, Beijing hotels suffered a drop in room revenue of 4.5 per cent over the same period last year, while average occupancy rate dropped 2.2 per cent.

Wessel Krauss, general manager of the newly opened Hotel Eclat Beijing, observed that the city has not been performing well in inbound tourism, and that although there has been a slight increase in visitor numbers, it is insignificant due to the addition of more rooms.

"The remainder of 2013 will prove to be tough and we expect not to be able to meet our target for the second half of the year," said Krauss.

Pentahotel Beijing's general



Wangfujing in Dongcheng District is one of Beijing's most famous shopping streets

manager, Yves Godard, attributed the drop in visitor numbers to Beijing's unfavourable weather conditions and the H7N9 bird flu epidemic. However, he is optimistic about the outlook for the next six months.

"We are seeing an increase in occupancy...with our newly renovated product, we're confident that we will be able to make up for the shortfall we faced in the

first half of the year.

"In addition, the Beijing government has issued a series of initiatives to expand the 72-hour visa-free policy, including the implementation of incentives for inbound travel agencies and continuous promotional efforts to attract foreign tourists through the rebate policy on shopping departure tax (which is currently being tried out). These initia-

tives will definitely boost international arrivals to Beijing," said Godard.

Hotels such as China World Summit Wing Beijing has benefited from the new visa policy. Said a spokesman from the hotel: "Some of our guests have taken advantage of the 72-hour visa-free policy already. Many have expressed that this arrangement is very convenient.

Fewer foreigners

14.7

Percentage drop in international overnight visitor numbers to Beijing for the first seven months of this year over the same period last year

"We have also disseminated news of the visa-free policy to our key feeder markets and many travel consultants and travellers have given us positive feedback."

Aviation wise, the introduction of more international routes connecting new destinations to Beijing has strengthened the city's position as an international hub. Air China stepped up international connections with its launch of four-weekly nonstop Houston-Beijing services in July and four-weekly Geneva-Beijing services in May.

Viewpoints

China

Compiled by
Prudence Lui

What is your business outlook for the next six months?

What does Beijing need in order to compete well?

What is your key business concern over the next six months?



Jeremy Brook
Director of marketing
The Peninsula Beijing

Positive, as The Peninsula Beijing is doing better than last year in terms of occupancy, strengthened by traditional demand during the holiday periods of October and Chinese New Year. Our only concern is (the insufficient) international arrivals.

Despite being such a dynamic and exciting city to visit, plus the new 72-hour visa-free policy, Beijing – and indeed China – must continue to work on its environmental issues, which may deter foreign arrivals.

The current oversupply of rooms. We believe that Beijing will continue to attract visitors – both domestic and international – but in the short term, the growing supply may have a negative impact on rates.

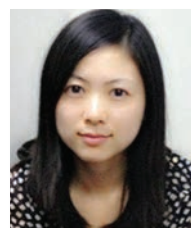


David C Wilson
Managing director
The Ritz-Carlton, Beijing

We are optimistic while remaining cautious. The booking pace is picking up, but budgets are still under pressure and expense constrained for some companies. The government's austerity measures are still in place, which does have some impact on bookings.

Good infrastructure, coupled with a safe and secure environment, both of which it already has. The government needs to make greater efforts in addressing major concerns of road traffic congestion and air pollution, both of which have a negative impact on demand.

The macro economic situation is still uncertain, but we are seeing increasing domestic travel as well as demand for luxury hotels.



Sara Liu
Assistant deputy general manager
HRG China

We are seeing a stable increase in domestic meetings and leisure trips. China's forecast of 9.3 per cent growth will drive the improvement of MICE infrastructure in various cities like Ningxia, Xiamen, Qingdao and Tianjin.

Beijing is faced with competition from other cities. Continuing efforts must be made to improve the overall environment and infrastructure. More diversity in accommodation and event venue options, such as boutique hotels or distinctive restaurants, are needed.

The volatile world economy has led to many multinational companies tightening the control of travel approval processes and budget. Chinese companies also tend to have fragmented internal processes, which makes it difficult for companies to use an international TMC to manage policy compliance at the service fulfillment stage.

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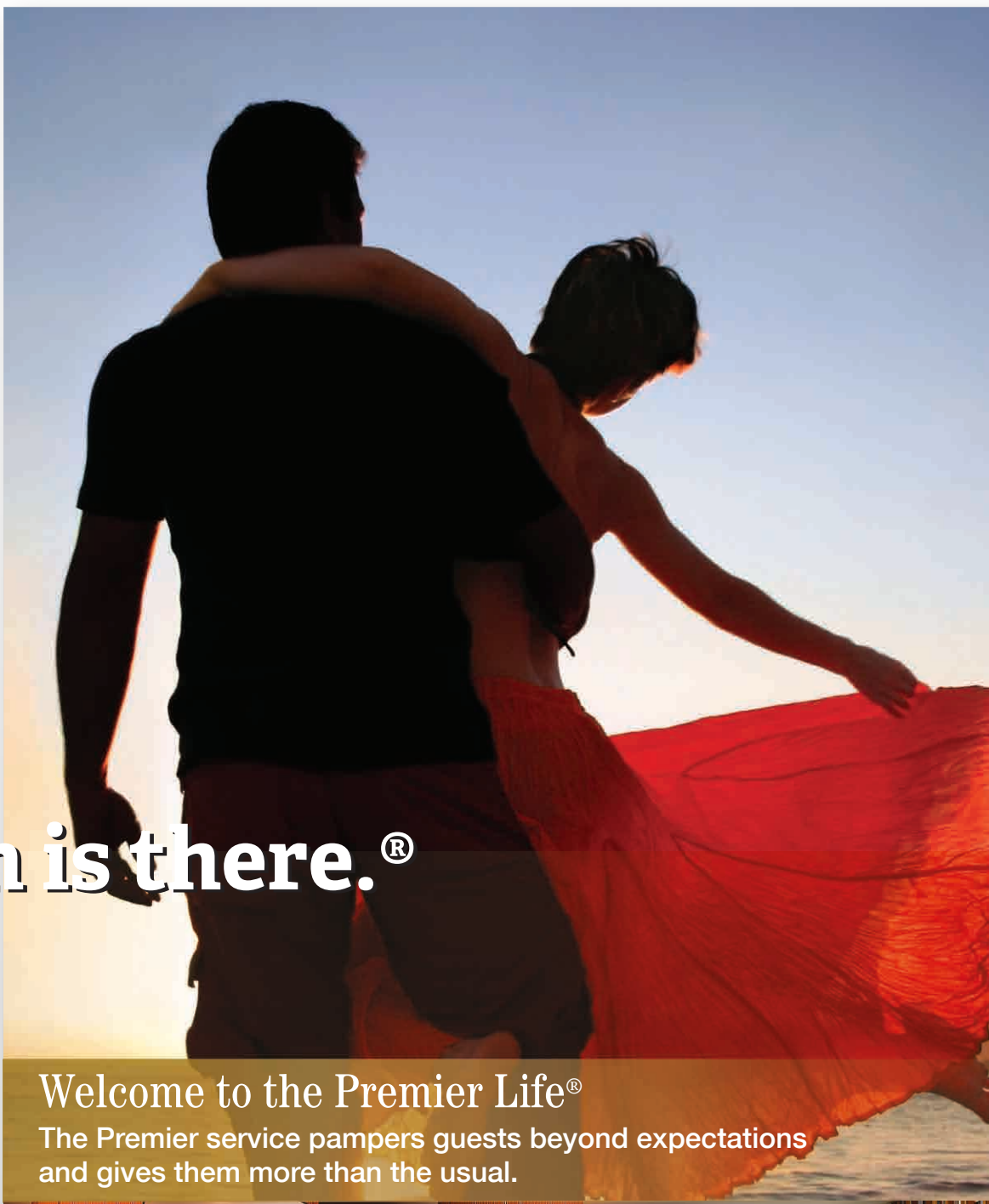
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Viewpoints

Fiji

Compiled by
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Outrigger on the Lagoon, Fiji



Aaron McGrath
Managing director
Sonaisali Island Resort and Tadrai
Island Resort



Mark Slimmer
General manager
Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort, Fiji



Roel Constantino
Director of sales and marketing
Shangri-La's Fijian Resort & Spa

What is your business
outlook for the next six
months?

We expect business to remain consistent with current occupancies in 2013, so somewhere in excess of 80 per cent.

Extremely positive for both properties. Although we're entering low season, we're seeing (stronger) year-on-year bookings (thanks to) Tourism Fiji. Tadrai is only in its second year of operations but it is already running profitably.

April to September this year have been solid and October is also going to be a very strong month. Softer months will start in November, with the exception of Christmas and the New Year. Forward bookings for 2014 are very sound.

The school breaks and Christmas holidays define the busiest periods in October, December and January. MICE business booked in the shoulder periods will sustain volume in the next six months.

What does Fiji need in order
to compete well?

More airlines to fly into the country. It would be wonderful if we had Emirates or Etihad flying from Europe.

Fiji is a tactical destination and people respond well to tactical marketing. Campaigns and advertising (bring quick) consumer response. We need more tactical marketing campaigns to keep the demand coming.

February is our softest month so we take advantage of this by closing the resort for (quick) upgrades and enhancements. We completed a number of great enhancements this year and are now planning further ones when we close for a short period in February 2014.

Fiji's new campaign *Where Happiness Finds You* is refreshing and the integrated approach is effective in keeping the destination top of mind. Technology has impacted the industry and to remain competitive, Fiji must keep innovating and use technology to reach new markets.

What is your key business
concern over the next six
months?

The main concern for Fiji is the weakening of the Australian dollar, as over 70 per cent of our visitors to Fiji come from Australia.

We don't have concerns as such, but we need to keep our foot on the gas and make sure that the tourism infrastructure in Fiji works together. Even with the weakening dollar, I think Fiji is a destination that offers very good value.

NIL

The market can be rather volatile. Offers are very competitive and with the relative ease of booking, there is a tendency (for consumers) to wait for the best offers before deciding to buy. This shortens the lead time for reservations.



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All eyes on ASEAN markets

Partnerships with airlines, inbound operators forged to create new products. By **S Puvaneswary**

ASEAN markets stood out as the star contributor to Brunei's air arrivals in 2012, with 209,108 tourists from the region or 56 per cent of the total figure. This is followed by the Far East with a 19 per cent contribution, Europe with 10 per cent and Australia/New Zealand with six per cent.

Persistent growth in Asia-Pacific has encouraged Brunei Tourism to continue its focus on developing the region as a tourism source market. For the Muslim segment in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, Brunei Tourism is actively promoting Islamic tourism packages.

Sports tourism is also being promoted, especially in regional markets where direct flights are available.

According to the tourism board's acting director, Mariani Hj Sabtu, Brunei's hosting of the annual Brunei Open since 2005 has helped to position the destination well among the world's golf community.

Besides golf, Brunei is sharpening its reputation as a diving destination. There are more than 10 dive sites in Brunei, including shallow coral sites that are perfect for inexperienced divers and challenging reef and wreck dives. The shipwrecks, scattered between Brunei and the Malaysian island of Labuan, are mostly in pristine condition due to little dive activity.

This year, Brunei Tourism is targeting a year-on-year increase of 11.5 per cent from last year's arrival numbers. It is working



Brunei's Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque cuts a stunning figure at dusk

Elia Fegari

"I hope the private sector will invest in staff training to improve service standards. I also hope that tour operators will enhance their products and promote them on their own, instead of depending on Brunei Tourism for international promotions."

Mariani Haji Sabtu
Acting director
Brunei Tourism

with Royal Brunei Airlines, inbound tour operators, as well as foreign airlines that fly to Brunei on joint marketing and promotional activities and to develop new tourism products.

Mariani said: "The quality and variety of tourism products and services need to be continuously improved and enhanced. To maximise the benefits of tourism growth, every stakeholder – especially product

owners and tour operators – need to show their commitment to ensure their products continue to attract and satisfy target clients".

Destination promotion plans are unfortunately hazy for European markets due to "unpredictable market situations", according to Mariani.

"That said, we are optimistic that with the right product (for) a very sophisticated clientele, we

still can tap this market. Bird watching in Brunei, for example, will appeal especially to bird clubs and keen birders in the UK," she added.

Peter Feran, general manager of Radisson Hotel Brunei Darussalam, warned that the lack of direct flights from capital cities in the region and longhaul destinations remained one of the biggest stumbling blocks for the country's tourism trade.

Viewpoints

Brunei

Compiled by
S Puvaneswary

What is your business outlook for the next six months?

What does Brunei need in order to compete well?

What is your key business concern over the next six months?



Peter Feran
General manager
Radisson Hotel Brunei Darussalam

It is positive, primarily driven by the ASEAN Summit meetings in Brunei this year, as well as BRIDEX 2013 in early December. However, 1Q2014 remains a little uncertain with no major events or happenings forecasted for Brunei.

Brunei needs to offer quality attractions in order to compete with the other ASEAN destinations (and to attract) MICE and leisure travellers to Brunei for at least four days. Other infrastructure, like Internet access, needs improvement too.

There is no indication from the government on whether there will be post-ASEAN Summit events between January and April 2014. I hope there are plans to continue the positive performance of 2013.



Andy Goh
General manager
The Brunei Hotel

The yearend looks promising with the ASEAN Summit meetings and BRIDEX 2013. We hope tourist arrivals for 2014 will be boosted by oil and gas business partnerships between the country and International companies.

Brunei Tourism needs to identify its strengths and opportunities to promote the destination. As Brunei is a reverent Muslim state, we wish to see growth in eco-tourism and have more tourists coming for mental and spiritual retreats.

We wish for no or minimal man-made and natural disasters – for example, heavy haze from neighbouring countries – that will greatly affect Brunei's tourism and hospitality industry.



Sugumaran Nair
Manager, inbound & MICE division
Frema Travel Services

Positive because the ASEAN Summit has placed Brunei in the limelight and we hope delegates will return to Brunei for holidays. In 2014, we expect more regional travel and will be busy during the Chinese New Year period next year.

Brunei needs more direct regional and longhaul flights as these will make it easier for us to promote the destination internationally. We also need more branded goods at shopping malls as shopping is a draw for tourists.

None. Brunei Tourism is doing its best on destination promotions and attending major travel shows in markets where there are direct air links. What could jeopardise (arrivals to Brunei) are major health (issues) and epidemics.



Adam Tan
Managing director
Travelhub

The future is looking good. *Super-Star Aquarius* will call on Bandar Seri Begawan once a week from November 2013 until end of March 2014, giving us opportunities to conduct sight-seeing tours for cruise passengers.

We need better public transportation and more taxis to encourage the growth of the FIT segment. We also need more international promotions so Brunei will be better known to the world.

Manpower. We need more trained people in the hospitality industry, from hotel staff to tour guides to restaurant staff. They should all be aware of the needs of international guests. Continuous training will raise the industry's standards.

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Policy overhauls needed

Lower taxation rates, relaxed visa rules could give a fillip to India's tourism industry. By **Rohit Kaul**

Indian tour operators are bracing for more challenging times ahead. According to statistics from India's Ministry of Tourism (MoT), foreign arrivals from January to July 2013 rose 3.3 per cent to 3.8 million, a significantly slower pace of growth compared with the 6.1 per cent increase and 3.7 million international arrivals recorded during the same period last year.

"This year, business (volume) has been quite low. The growth is not even five per cent month-on-month," said Sarabjit Singh, senior vice president, Indian Association of Tour Operators.

Pronab Sarkar, owner of Swagatam Tours, concurred: "Business has been disappointing this year. A slowdown in source markets like Europe has been a key reason for this lacklustre year."

Travel trade members opined that India should look beyond traditional source markets.

"India, being such a large country and with so much to offer, shouldn't depend on just a few countries. We need to develop new markets," urged Singh.

"State governments and the MoT have to work together for the growth of inbound tourism. The ministry had proposed providing marketing development assistance to tour operators, but this proposal has been pending approval from the govern-



The Indian government has stepped up efforts to clean up tourist spots such as New Delhi's Red Fort

"We need active involvement of the corporate sector to adopt important tourist sites and monuments under the corporate social responsibility (programme). India Tourism Development Corporation has already come forward by adopting the Qutub Minar."

K Chiranjeevi, tourism minister, India

ment for the past one-and-a-half years," he added.

At the same time, the Indian travel trade is also urging the authorities to look into long-pending issues such as extending visa-on-arrival facility to more

nationalities and rationalising taxes to make India a more attractive travel destination for foreigners.

Meanwhile, the Indian hotel industry has also hit rough patches this year.

Said Gitanjali Singh, head of sales at Hotel The Royal Plaza New Delhi: "The hospitality sector has been hit hard by the economic slowdown. Occupancy rates in five-star hotels in big cities such as New Delhi have gone

down by about 15 per cent from last year."

MoT on its part is trying to promote new tourism products apart from the present popular tourist circuits. K Chiranjeevi, India's tourism minister, had announced in June the launch of a new campaign, *777 days of the Indian Himalayas*, to promote and market the destination on the international stage.

Furthermore, in view of safety issues concerning foreign tourists, Chiranjeevi also urged all Indian states and union territory authorities to set up tourist police at the earliest.

The minister, who had tendered his resignation earlier this month and is at press time awaiting approval from the government for his desired departure from service, has also expressed concern over the high tax structure on tourism products.

Collective taxes such as VAT, service tax and luxury tax on tourism-related services range from 20 to 30 per cent in India, compared with five to 10 per cent in the neighbouring countries.

"I have initiated a dialogue with the finance ministry to rationalise the central taxes. State tourism ministers on their part should take up the issue of rationalisation of state taxes with their respective finance departments," he said.

Viewpoints

India

Compiled by
Rohit Kaul

What is your business outlook for the next six months?

What does India need in order to compete well?

What is your key business concern over the next six months?



Ramesh Wattal
Managing director
Welcome Travels

I expect inbound tourism to grow in the next six months because of the rupee's depreciation. Tour package rates have become competitive so if the benefits are passed on to the customers, it will augur well for the industry.

The Ministry of Tourism needs to be more active in promoting lesser known destinations during their overseas road shows; promoting well-known destinations like Rajasthan and Kerala don't serve much purpose.

Female travellers have expressed concerns over their safety in our country, so the biggest challenge is to assure these foreign tourists that India is a safe destination to travel in.



Ranjan Kumar Mishra
Managing director
Eastern Voyage

We expect business to grow since prices of tour packages are now more competitive for the international markets due to the rupee's depreciation, coupled with visa-on-arrival facility which has been extended to more airports.

Extending visa-on-arrival facility to more countries, and creating a positive image and market-specific campaigns should be the government's focus. The government should also promote eastern states with a lot of potential, like Orissa.

The recent sexual assault of foreign tourists has generated widespread negative publicity for India and (notions of India as an unsafe country) need to be dispelled. The increase in aviation turbine fuel prices in India is another major concern.



Partha Chatterjee
Founder and executive director
Keys Hotels

We are expecting a surge in bookings from October onwards as the inbound market is looking positive. The Indian government is taking steps like offering visa on arrival at more airports, which I expect will reap benefits in coming months.

The government needs to look into the current taxation structure, a long-standing issue in the industry. Some states are taxing hotels on rack rates, which isn't logical. The industry would be relieved if the taxation structure was revisited.

High operational cost is a major challenge. New supply will also increase competition in the industry; the challenge will be felt more by five-star properties as most of the new rooms will be in this segment.



Gitanjali Singh
Head of sales
Hotel The Royal Plaza New Delhi

Growing supply and the (economic) slowdown, both global and domestic, have impacted the hospitality industry. However, hotel performance is expected to improve steadily when the tourist season starts in October.

Hospitality is a highly taxed industry. The government should look into providing tax (concessions) to the sector as we are already reeling under high operational costs – profitability of premium hotels is expected to dip in 2013-2014.

Higher luxury tax on rooms is one of our biggest concerns. Achieving increase in occupancy and average room rates will also be one of the prime concerns for the industry.

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Join us at the "Taste of USA"! Meet the Brand USA team,
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12.45pm- 2pm, October 24, 2013, Thursday
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WELCOME to our USA Pavilion at ITB Asia 2013.

On behalf of all of us at Brand USA, we thank you for being part of the inaugural USA Pavilion at ITB Asia, making this the biggest USA presence ever in the leading trade show.

Brand USA is the first ever unified international marketing organization that promotes premier travel to the United States, including all 50 states, District of Columbia and 5 territories of USA.

We are the first nationally coordinated marketing effort to bring more international travelers and their spending to the United States – which benefits the U.S. economy through increased economic development and jobs.

Following a strong inaugural brand campaign launched in Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom last year – intent to travel from those markets increased significantly (12% in Canada, 14% in Japan, and 14% in the United Kingdom). Brand USA will introduce campaigns in Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore in the last quarter 2013.

Our commitment at Brand USA is to create cooperative marketing platforms and programs that add and create value while generating a strong return on investment for everyone with a vested interest in our collective success.

The Asia Pacific is the world's fastest-growing travel region, expected to reach US\$357 billion this year. Brand USA hopes to ignite the desire of Asia-Pacific travelers to experience the limitless possibilities that the land of dreams has to offer through four experience pillars - urban excitement, great outdoors, culture and indulgence. Be it exploring a larger-than-life city or wandering way off the beaten path, there is something different to experience every corner.

Christopher L. Thompson
President and CEO
Brand USA



Bright lights and big cities – the United States is home to big city buzz, shopping, iconic architecture, Broadway shows, and there's nowhere in the world better for a spot of people watching. It's the place to see and be seen.

America is the birthplace of iconic cities, such as **Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Chicago, Miami, Boston, New York City** and the capital city, **Washington, D.C.** – each a brimming metropolis whose name alone conjures different notions of culture, cuisine and entertainment.

America is a vast country, however. Look more closely and you'll find a huge and surprising variety in our cities: the eclectic music scene of **Austin**, the easy-going charms of historical **Savannah**, the eco

consciousness of **Seattle**, the free-spirited **Portland**, the magnificent waterfront of **San Francisco**, and the captivating cultured old quarters of **New Orleans**.

Discover the buzz of our cities, where the skyscrapers, celebrities and shopping strips are as big as each other and all of which is just a short drive from national parks, mountains, ocean, river or desert, and each has uniqueness to experience. You can see it in our architecture; experience it in our cosmopolitan malls, shops, theatres and bars; taste it in our local food and wine; hear it from the people that live there and feel it in our great cities.

We welcome you to our cities to enjoy the well-known American lifestyle – from dawn til dusk, and nightlife after.

Some Key Facts

- Experience the icons from the inside. Many of our postcard locations, such as the **Statue of Liberty**, can be seen from the inside and will give you a different view of the famous buildings and structures you instantly recognise as being American
- Explore our cities on some unusual transportation. Take a guided tour on the back of a **Harley Davidson**, hire a yacht and explore the stunning coastlines or take a scenic flight in a **helicopter** for an entirely different perspective from above
- Our cities are **shop-till-you-drop** destinations and there are many world renowned American goods to consider for your shopping list
- The first US capital was **New York City**
- **Chicago's** nicknames include: The Windy City, the City of Big Shoulders, the Second City, and The City That Works
- **Greater Miami** is the only metropolitan area in the United States whose borders encompass two national parks - Everglades National Park and Biscayne National Park



- **San Francisco Bay** is considered the world's largest landlocked harbor
- **Boston** built the first subway system in the United States in 1897
- In approximately 440 miles (a little over 7 hours of driving) you can travel from **Boston** to **Washington DC** and pass by **New York City, Philadelphia** and **Baltimore**
- **Central Park** in New York City is 843 acres and completely man made; it is visited by over 37 million people every year

The United States of America's all-encompassing Great Outdoors offers myriad experiences. Across this huge and varied land, visitors will come across a diverse country like never before that is just waiting to be explored; from national parks to scenic byways and from spectacular sun-drenched coastlines to awesome snow covered mountains.

Explore the national, state and local parks to discover America's varied landscapes - perfect for a leisurely walk or a more challenging hike in and many of which with the knowledge of a local guide. Experience endless skies and camp out under the stars, or hit the road and take your time enjoying an iconic road trip.

Enjoy the journey. This is a country of road trips and great open spaces; where four million miles of highways lead past red-rock deserts, below towering mountain peaks, and across wheat fields that roll off towards the horizon. Take your time traveling through rolling countryside and along sparkling coastlines giving you plenty of opportunities to take both classic routes and roads less traveled and to meet the locals along the way. Traveling by

GREAT OUTDOORS

train is another great way to traverse the USA and enjoy the jaw-dropping scenery.

Spend some time in the sun playing a relaxing round of golf on one of the many courses or ski in one of the USA's numerous resorts. Skiing is possible in over 30 U.S. states and resorts offer unique locations, such as lakeside or under the Northern Lights. Across the country, you'll find many places offer snow, slopes, and stunning scenery. On holiday here you'll find it almost compulsory to take a break from your usual world, to meet a winemaker, go fishing or explore beautiful gardens and arboretums.

The USA has some of the world's most distinctive and diverse natural environments, with unique wildlife and spectacular landscapes, including many national parks and World Heritage sites.

Some Key Facts



- The USA has nearly **400 National Parks** to which we welcome over 275 million visitors each year
- The Grand Prismatic Spring in **Yellowstone National Park** is the third largest hot spring in the world
- There are nearly 3000 (2917) miles between **New York** and **California**, slightly less than the distance from New York to London (3400 miles)
- **Yosemite National Park** is the oldest national park in the world
- The very middle of the USA is in the town of **Castle Rock** in South Dakota
- The wettest place in the world is **Mountain Waialeale** in Hawaii
- **Maine** sees the sunrise before the whole continental USA

This is a country of road trips and great open spaces; where four million miles of highways lead past red-rock deserts, below towering mountain peaks, and across wheat fields that roll off towards the horizon.

Glacier National Park





American Indian Child

CULTURE

From theatre to literature, Americans have long had a love affair with the arts. The world’s third-largest nation has made tremendous contributions to the arts. Georgia O’Keeffe’s wild landscapes, Robert Rauschenberg’s surreal collages, Alexander Calder’s elegant mobiles and Jackson Pollock’s drip paintings have entered the vernacular of modern 20th-century art. Cities such as Chicago and New York have become veritable drawing boards for the great architects of the modern era, and the USA’s cities abound with art galleries and museums – a must-visit during any holiday.

Our cities play host to a huge array of cutting-edge cultural festivals, and offer music, theatre and dance performances and art exhibitions every day of the week. Get involved in traditional American Indian events and enjoy taking part in a Pow Wow’s musical and cultural events. In smaller towns you can catch performances by local musicians and see hand-made art and craft.

Think America and many people think sports. It’s no secret that America is a country of sports. There are hundreds of national and thousands of local, regional and state sporting organisations across professional and

college levels. The nation’s four most popular team sports all developed in North America: American football (NFL), baseball (MLB), basketball (NBA) and ice hockey (NHL) and the fun and games go on all year round. In spring and summer there’s baseball almost daily; in fall and winter football takes the stage, while in winter nights there’s plenty of basketball to enjoy. All enjoy huge exposure and are considered the preeminent competitions in their respective sports in the world.

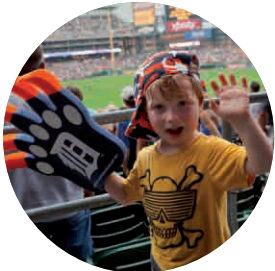
Formula 1 has revved up recently in the USA, and finds itself growing in popularity alongside Nascar racing, as the Circuit of the Americas hosts events in Austin and New Jersey.

Sport draws Americans together and for visitors getting tickets to a sporting event is the perfect way to get involved in the American way of life, so grab a beer and a hot dog, get behind your team and enjoy the game.

Some Key Facts

- **Houston** is second only to **New York City** when it comes to the number of **Broadway** shows
- In Nebraska, you can still see the tracks of **wagons** from over 100 years ago
- **The Palace of the Governors** in New Mexico is the oldest continuously occupied public building in the USA
- The first person to personally receive a star on the **Walk of Fame** in **Hollywood** was actress **Joanne Woodward** in 1960
- **The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum** and the **Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History** in Washington, D.C. are the world’s second and third most visited museums, behind only the Louvre in Paris

Art, music, theatre and sports!



- **Iolani Palace** in Honolulu, Hawaii, is the only royal palace used by a monarch in the USA
- **Kansas City** has more fountains than any other city in the world, except Rome
- **Austin**, Texas, is considered the live music capital of the world
- **New Orleans** is the birthplace of jazz and also known as America’s first city of opera

The nation’s four most popular team sports all developed in North America: American football (NFL), baseball (MLB), basketball (NBA) and ice hockey (NHL)

INDULGENCE

America knows how to indulge and gives a wow-factor to any holiday. Ideal for a fun-filled family holiday, no other country does theme parks quite like the USA. From the famed Universal Studios and Walt Disney World in Florida and its sister Disneyland Resort in California, to the enormous Schlitterbahn Waterpark in Texas and the 364-acre Cedar Point in Ohio, there is no comparison when it comes to family holidays. In addition, there's nowhere quite like the neon lights of Las Vegas for a different kind of playground.

From gaming to luxury spas and resorts, it starts in America. We lead the way when it comes to innovative and unusual new treatments which can be enjoyed in the likes of a mountain retreat or a luxurious beachside resort. From spa retreats to American Indian treatments, the country's spa experiences are recognised as among the best in the world. Here, you can find the perfect resorts in idyllic locations; so if you're looking for a massage, it's all at your fingertips.

Cuisine is another way of highlighting the indulgent American experience. From the East Coast to the West Coast and everywhere in-between, the USA has a varied and famed food scene. Expect to see thick barbecue ribs and smoked brisket delivered piping hot at a Texas roadhouse; watch talented chefs blend organic, fresh-off-the-farm produce with Asian twists at award-winning West Coast restaurants; get your fix of fresh bagels and lox at a century-old deli in Manhattan's Upper West Side, or indulge in plump pancakes, fried bacon and eggs over easy under the clatter of cutlery at a 1950s-style diner. Steaming plates of fresh lobster are served at the waterside in Maine, while oysters and champagne are quaffed in fashionable city wine bars, and beer and pizza are served at an authentic Midwestern watering hole. Whatever your taste – there's no shortage of ways to dine à la Americana.

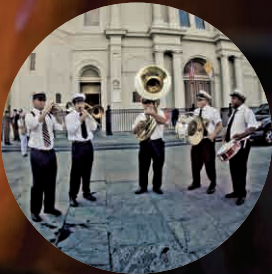
Whatever you're having, enjoy it with a glass of locally produced wine or microbrew and some indigenous toe-tapping tunes.

Musically speaking, America has few peers on the world stage. From the soulful blues born in the Mississippi

Delta to the bluegrass of Appalachia and Detroit's Motown sound, plus jazz, funk, hip-hop, country, and rock and roll – America has invented sounds that are integral to modern music across the globe and which resonate across our lifestyle.

From the East Coast to the West Coast and everywhere in-between, the USA has a varied and famed food scene.

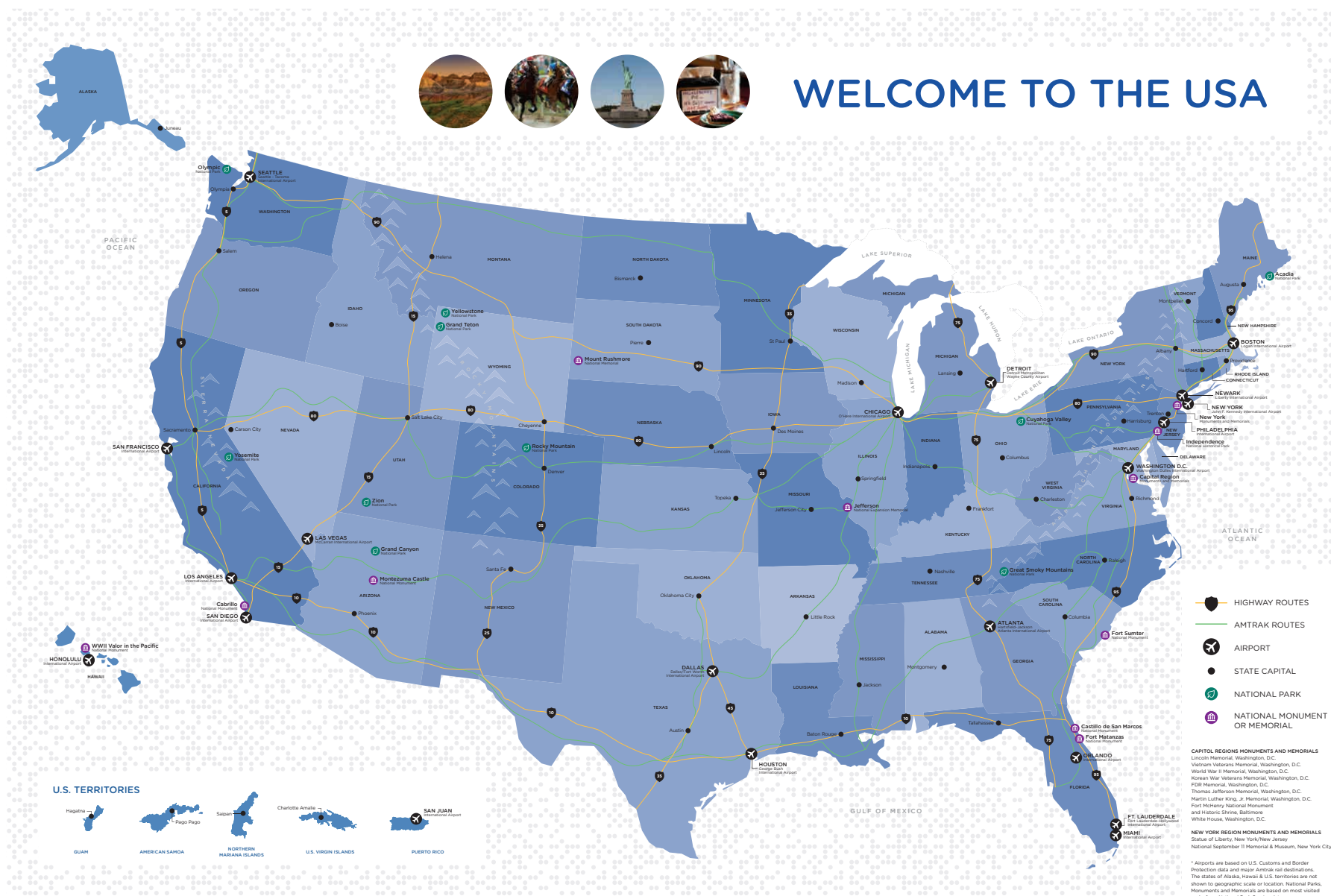
Coastlines, mountains & road trips!



Some Key Facts

- **Ohio's Cedar Point** in Sandusky packs more thrills per square foot than anywhere else on the planet
- **Finger Lakes** in New York State is second only to California in terms of wine production
- **Las Vegas** has the most hotel rooms and the majority of the largest hotels in the world
- **Orlando** attracts more visitors than any other amusement park destination in the United States
- **Hershey,** Pennsylvania, is considered the Chocolate Capital of the United States
- **Coca-Cola** was invented in May 1886 by Dr. John S. Pemberton in Atlanta, Georgia
- **New Jersey** has the most diners in the world and is sometimes referred to as the diner capital of the world





ENTRY INFORMATION

Are you a Visa Waiver Programme traveler? If you're planning a trip to the United States, make sure you get your travel authorisation first. The ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation) application process is fast, easy, costs only US\$14 and is valid for up to two years or until your passport expires. Apply for your ESTA and learn more on the only official website: esta.cbp.dhs.gov.

Before entering the country, make sure you know what items you must declare. Educate yourself on U.S. travel regulations for a quicker, simpler entry process, whether you're coming home or taking a holiday with family and friends.

What are the rules regarding large amounts of money?

Anyone traveling with \$10,000 or more in cash — whether it's in U.S. Dollars, another currency or any other monetary instrument — you must declare it.

What may I bring in duty-free?

- No more than 200 cigarettes and 100 cigars per individual 18 and older
- Up to one litre of alcoholic beverages per individual 21 and older
- Gifts and purchases valued at a maximum of \$100 total

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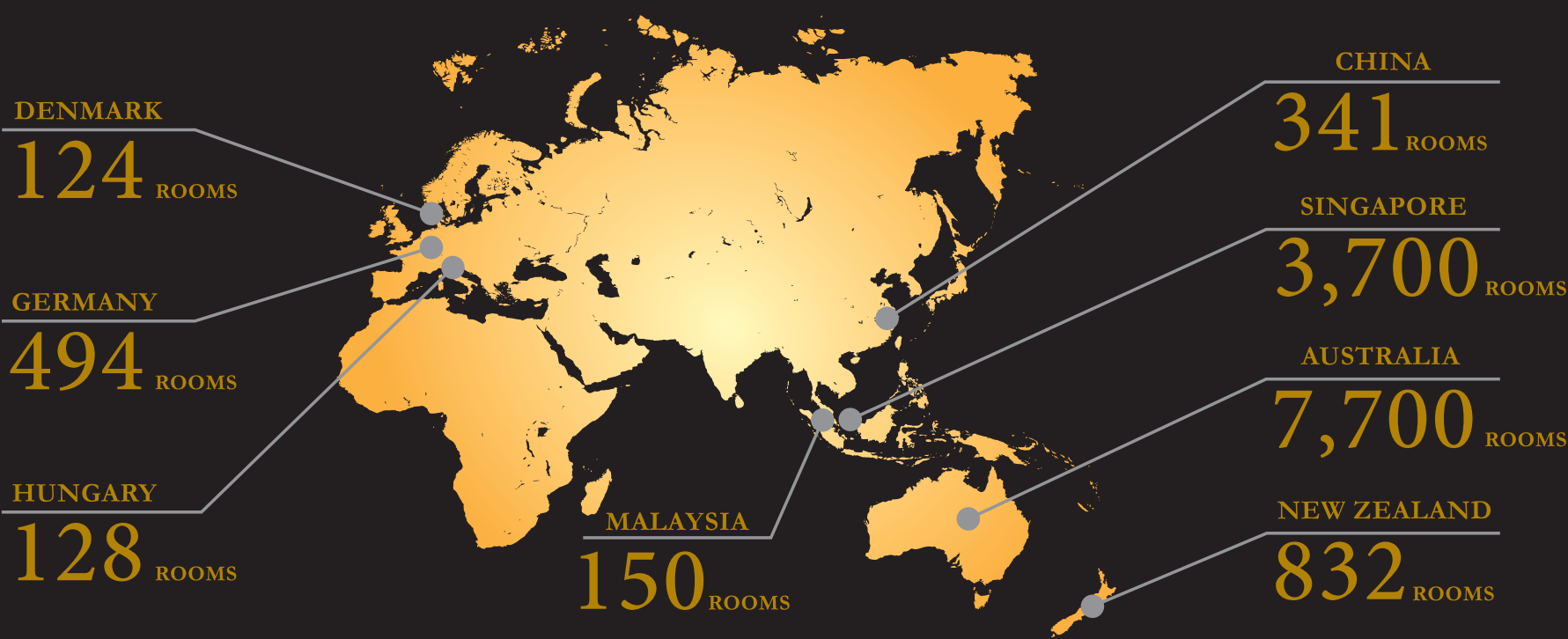
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Adina, Medina, Vibe and Travelodge brands are managed by Toga Hotels, a subsidiary of Far East Hospitality.

A close-up photograph of a glass filled with a golden, bubbly beverage, likely a cocktail or sparkling wine. A slice of orange is perched on the rim of the glass. The background is dark, making the glass and its contents stand out.

Party @ Park

Grand Park City Hall

10 Coleman Street

24.10.2013 | 9.30 pm - 12.00 am

Swap that heavy laptop bag
with a cocktail and dance partner.

Throw your tie and blazer aside.
Lose your inhibitions and dance the night away.

Eat. Drink. Dance. Party @ Park.

Come dressed in black, gold or red!

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Travel Trade


PARK HOTEL GROUP

Camera-ready attendees By Patrick Tan



Bintan Resort Cakrawala's Albel Singh and Asad Shiraz, and Panacea Hong Kong's Steven Howard



Pegasus Vietnam's Justin Paul Foot and Tran Thi Minh Khanh, and nor1 South-Pacific and North Asia's Peter Ollerton



AHS Hong Kong's Kevin B Murphy, Las Vegas Sands Corp's John W Mims and Think 8 Singapore's Ray Bigger



Locatel South-east Asia's Derek Ng, Fairmont Raffles Hotels International Singapore's Dinesh Soni, Agilysys Singapore's Peter Tay and Locatel South-east Asia's Francis Neo



Alternaty Vietnam's Mauro Gasparotti and Zerim Properties Malaysia's Previn-dran Singhe



E Horner & Associates Australia's Ted Horner and nor1 Asia-Pacific's Allan Taylor



Singapore Tourism Board's Lawrence Tan Peng Thiam and Raine Lee Feng Yu



Questex Hospitality+Travel US' Marilyn McHugh, Digital Innovation Asia's Jens Thraenhart and Tourism Australia's Ben Yates



TIGERTMS Asia-Pacific's Yoeri De Pauw and TMS-Comtelco Dubai's Sandeep Nair



GPS Development Services Singapore's Damien Oh, Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts Singapore's Michael Lee and Neptune Orient Lines Singapore's Wong Kar Hong



iBAHN Singapore's Ernest Teng and The Hong-kong and Shanghai Hotels Hong Kong's Shane Izaks

Happy get-together By Patrick Tan



Booking.com Singapore's Motoi Mori and IKYU Corporation Japan's Kentaro Yoshida



Rome2rio Australis's Rod Cuthbert and Carol Hutzelman



Republic Polytechnic Singapore's Brian Tan and Satisfly Intelligent Travel Hong Kong's Sergio Mello



ONYX Hospitality Group Thailand's Stefan Wolf and Travelport Asia-Pacific's Patrick Andres



Starwood Hotels and Resorts' Shyn Yee Ho-Strangas, Shangri-La Hotel Singapore's Ting Chiu and Shangri-La Hotel and Resorts Hong Kong's Michael Leong



Agora Hospitalities Japan's Satomi Nakabayashi and Hanako Yoshikawa



Bizgate's Angeline Rivera, Alliyah M G and Home Away USA's Varun Kerof



Orbitz Asia's Aileen Chan and hotelcombined.com Australia's Hichame Assi



Expedia Asia-Pacific's David Asahara, Expedia Singapore's Kathleen Tan and Expedia India's Vikram Malhi



Wotif Group Australia's Scott Blume and Rave Singapore's Vera Lye

Indonesian hotels look beyond Oad Reizen's fall

Trade says risks are inevitable; urges ASEAN to offer protection

By Mimi Hudoyo

DUTCH tour operator Oad Reizen may have collapsed, but this has not deterred Indonesian hoteliers from securing direct contracts with overseas tour operators, albeit with greater caution.

Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association Bali Chapter chairman, Cokorda Oka Ardana Sukawati, said: "This is not the first time hotels have become a victim. We have seen the collapse of tour operators before and also dealt with hit-and-run Korean and Russian operators. These have not stopped us from doing business with them, although we do learn from our mistakes."

He said direct contracting with overseas tour operators today is something hoteliers cannot avoid. "What we need to do is to find a way to minimise risks, including looking at laws that can protect us."

Similarly, Royal Pita Maha sales and marketing director, Pande Sutawan, said: "While we do not have direct contracts with Oad Reizen, we have direct overseas businesses. (What happened to) the Dutch tour operator can also happen to my partners, but it is a business risk."

"The rule of the game is, the



Pande: "We tend to loosen the rules"

sweeter the business, the higher the risk, but as businessmen we should be able to calculate the risk and put it in the contract." He gave examples of setting a credit limit of 10 per cent of the total contract value and asking for advance payment beyond that percentage. "This is actually common practice but sometimes, when we have had a longstanding relationship with a partner, we tend to loosen the rules we have made."

Panorama group managing director, Dharma Tirtawisata, opined: "I think the lesson learnt here is that if the hoteliers want to work directly with overseas tour operators, they should deal with public-listed companies as their financial reports are transparent. Being a long-existing and established company does not always mean it is strong."

"But the best thing is to go through local inbound operators. If anything happens, it is easier to catch Dharma than Mr

X overseas."

However, Sense Hotel Seminyak general manager, Gufron, said: "We prefer to work with local tour operators, but the big operators overseas have policies insisting on direct contracts if we want to work with them, so it is not entirely up to us to choose a local partner vs direct overseas deals."

Meanwhile, Marintur executive director, Ismail Ali, thinks it requires the whole industry in Indonesia, and even ASEAN, to join hands to avoid further losses from such mishaps.

"We should not only look at the individual company's loss, but the whole country's, when a big company who sends large volumes of business collapses. A company like Oad sent groups not only to Indonesia but also to Thailand and Indochina, so ASEAN countries were also affected."

"Something like this has happened many times over the years, yet we still have nothing to protect our industry. I think ASEAN as an organisation should take the initiative and come up with rules and regulations to protect the regional industry, the way the EU does."

Sri Lanka new contender

By S Puvaneswary

LOW pricing on AirAsia X's new four-weekly service to Colombo is poised to make Sri Lanka an alternative to South-east Asia for Malaysian budget holiday makers and incentive groups, according to several travel agency chiefs.

Rakyat Travel general manager, Adam Kamal, said: "The new service offer a short travelling time of less than 2.5 hours, and return airfares on economy class are below RM700 (US\$222). Prices are on par with other South-east Asian destinations."

"We are creating three- to five-day ground packages covering tourist spots like Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya, Dambulla and Kandy."

Panorama Tours Malaysia managing director, Richard Vuilleumier, said the company had been promoting Sri Lanka since mid-2013 but did not push it aggressively until the entry of the budget carrier (in late September), whose prices are noticeably lower than other carriers even after the introductory promotional rates had ended.

Vuilleumier added: "(The new service) has given us an opportunity to create five-day/four-night

and four-day/three-night full-board packages with four-star hotels at below RM2,800."

"It is a good alternative destination for Malaysians who have already been to South-east Asia and China and are now looking for new destinations."

"Halal food is also not a problem in Sri Lanka, and attractions are diverse."

On the challenges of selling the destination, Vuilleumier and Abdul Rahman Mohamed, deputy general manager for channel management at Mayflower Acme Tours, said there is a perception the destination is not safe.

Abdul Rahman added: "There is lack of awareness that the civil war in Sri Lanka has ended. It will help if the NTO has an office in Malaysia and a long-term marketing programme."

He said the company anticipates 10 per cent year-on-year growth for the year-end school holidays and more FITs from AirAsia X's entry.

Currently also servicing the Kuala Lumpur-Colombo routes are Malaysia Airlines, with 10-weekly flights, and SriLankan Airlines, with twice-daily flights.

"It is a good alternative destination for Malaysians who have already been to (ASEAN)."

Richard Vuilleumier

Managing director, Panorama Tours

Abu Dhabi tells Asians it is affordable

BOOMING Asian arrivals have encouraged Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority to focus more on the continent and push the country as an "affordable" luxury destination.

The NTO is leading a seven-strong delegation comprising key stakeholders at this year's ITB Asia. Its director for promotions and overseas offices, Mubarak Al Nuaimi, said: "Our participation

will be dual-pronged, targeting both the leisure and business segments. On the leisure front, we will get the message across that there is now so much to do and see in Abu Dhabi given a strong surge in our hotel portfolio, the opening of new attractions including stunning malls selling at tax-free prices, and a line-up of major sporting and entertainment events."

Growing fast and furious

313,221

The total number of Asian guests in Abu Dhabi hotels in the first eight months.

"We also want to correctly position the destination as a luxury, yet highly affordable choice where the average room rate is currently running at just under US\$120. Currently Asian guests are staying with us, on average, for just over three nights and we'd like to see this increase."

Al Nuaimi said the destination has a particular challenge in increasing the length of stay of Chinese guests, which is currently below two nights. He added that South Koreans stay longer due

to the emirate's diverse golf offerings. The NTO's figures show Abu Dhabi Golf Club, Saadiyat Beach Golf Club and Yas Links recording their best-ever quarterly overseas rounds returns in Q1, with 9,215 rounds at 89 per cent year-on-year growth.

Joining the NTO at ITB Asia are Yas Island, Etihad Airways, Grand Continental Flamingo Hotel, Park Hyatt Resort on Saadiyat Island, The Ritz-Carlton Abu Dhabi Grand Canal and City Season Al Hamra Hotel.

Meeting and learning By Patrick Tan



Kayumanis Indonesia's Nenny Malonda and Wego Dubai's Mohamad Ibrahim Masri



Telkom Indonesia's Bengris Pasaribu, Joddy Hernady and Dedy Ristanto

St Regis Singapore's Cat Wu and Cheryl Ong



Accor Asia-Pacific's Dona Louis and Jens Uwe Parkitny





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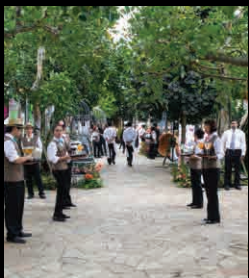
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