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Chinese ruling bites

Shopping groups take a beating, but FITs, quality tours to benefit

By Gracia Chiang

SELLERS hit by China's new tourism law that seeks to protect outbound travellers from zero-fare tours have seen their groups market dive. FITs, however, are expected to rise.

Lex Travel Singapore MICE and corporate development manager, Genie Peng, said the number of Chinese customers coming for shopping tours has dropped from 2,000-3,000 a month to 500 since the regulation kicked in on October 1.

Agencies are prohibited from obtaining illegitimate gains such as rebates by arranging shopping or providing tourism services that require additional payment, among other stipulations.

"We think that not many Chinese will choose to travel in groups anymore since our tour prices are at least double now. That's why we are customising



Gordon: good in the long run

more packages for FITs," said Peng.

Over in Phuket, The Village Coconut Island director of sales, Tom Gordon, has seen Chinese

group room nights slide from 1,500 to 800 this month. He, too, foresees an increase in FIT volume, as such travel becomes more "cost-effective".

Said Gordon: "It's a short-term loss, but this is good for Phuket in the long run."

He explained that with travellers not being dragged away to shop, guests are also spending more time within the hotel, leading to an increase in expenditure on F&B, spa and other services.

Others who do not sell shop-

ping tours said they have not been affected, but hailed the move as a positive one.

Hong Thai Travel Services Singapore assistant general manager, inbound, Tony Aw, said: "We think we will get more business because people will shift to more quality tours...It is very healthy for the industry, as it will help change the mentality of Chinese travellers."

ICS Travel Group Thailand chief sales officer, Sabine Widmann, added: "Our rates were never competitive enough in the Chinese market so this might change if the law is enforced."

Chinese buyers also lauded the new ruling. Beijing UTour International Travel Service operator, business conference exhibition, Joyce Cheng, said: "Our corporate groups used to ask us why our prices were so high. Now at least we're more competitive."

Garuda fuels demand from secondary cities

By Mimi Hudoyo

Garuda Indonesia is opening up demand from secondary and tertiary destinations in Indonesia through its new hubs beyond Jakarta and Bali.

The flag carrier opened its hub in Makassar last year and Medan earlier this year, offering direct flights to regional destinations like Singapore and Malaysia. Connections to neighbouring cities such as Padang and Palembang are also available.

In addition, the airline recently announced its order of 25 ATR 72-600 turboprop aircraft to cater to more remote areas like Bima, Ende, Labuan Bajo and Jember.

"These smaller aircraft will allow us to expand to these destinations," said Garuda Indonesia executive vice president marketing and sales, Erik Meijer.

"Every day we get local governments asking us when we are going to fly to their destinations. We have not been able to do that because we only operate bigger aircraft that cannot land in these destinations because of their short runways."

He added that the airline's expanding network is in line with the development of Indonesia.

"For example, we are planning to fly to Labuan Bajo (the gateway to Komodo) because the tourism authority has invested a lot in the tourism sector there."

Better infrastructure has also enabled the airline to introduce new flights.

Said Meijer: "Jember (East Java) was not accessible in the

past because there was no airport, although the potential was there."

In time to come, Garuda hopes that these new links can act as feeders for other routes.

"Many people in remote areas of Maluku or Sulawesi would usually need to spend days on boats (or land transport) to reach major cities when they want to go for Umrah or Hajj. With Garuda's expanded services, they can cut much of their travel time to major hubs and (easily) catch a flight to the Middle East," explained Meijer.

The new hubs also allow travellers to give Jakarta a miss.

"Previously you would always have to fly to Jakarta wherever you wanted to go. Now that flying is more affordable to people and we have more aircraft, we can actually avoid some of the Jakarta stopovers," he said.

Travellers from Padang can now choose to fly out of Medan to Singapore, for instance. With the deployment of aircraft in hubs, it also means that early departures are possible.

Quizzed if these secondary and tertiary destinations are more suitably served by LCCs, Meijer said: "LCCs fly to places where there is a lot of demand as they operate on volume (in order to keep prices low). We have not seen them going to these (places)."

He is also confident that travellers from such destinations will be willing to pay full-service fares, as they will consider the flights a necessity.

Outrigger to launch a second brand

By Raini Hamdi

OUTRIGGER Enterprises Group is launching a second global brand which will enable it to tap the mid-tier urban hotel market.

It has roped in Singapore-based Fitch to design the brand, which is expected to debut in 2014, most likely in homeground Hawaii, according to the group's EVP chief marketing officer, Sean Dee (right).

Dee said a number of loca-

tions has been identified in Australia and Asia for the brand, but will not reveal details.

He said while the second brand is another tool for branding and development, the focus remains on the core Outrigger, a resorts-oriented brand.

Since setting up an Asia-Pacific base in Phuket four years ago, and flushed with a capital fund, the group has expanded its footprint in the region in Thailand,

Bali, Australia and Mauritius (the 46th Outrigger hotel opening December), most of which it owns or has major stakes in.

In 2016/17, it will extend the Outrigger footprint to China and Vietnam (Hainan and and Vinh Hoi respectively).



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STIC widens market

India agency opens first overseas office in Singapore

By Gracia Chiang

STIC Travel Group India is setting up its first overseas office in Singapore to capture a slice of Asian outbound to India and bring more Indian tourists to this region.

"We would like to expand in Asia first before expanding in Europe and Africa," said founder chairman Subhash Goyal, who is also president of the Indian Association of Tour Operators.

Having organised its first fam trip for Singapore and Malaysian agencies in September, the B2B marketing office will further support agencies by providing customised programmes and helping with airline seat blocks.

"If we feel that an agency needs brochure support, we can also link them up with state NTOs," added Goyal.

In addition to its FIT business, STIC is, for the first time, running fixed departures of 20-30 pax out of Singapore from December to March.

About 60 per cent of STIC's inbound business to India comes from longhaul markets like the



Goyal: Asian expansion first

US, Europe and Australia, a percentage that should shift by the end of next year to a more balanced 50-50. "A lot of travel agencies collaborating with us for this winter season have not promoted India before," said Singapore-based director - group business development, Richa Goyal Sikri, adding that Asian markets such as Indonesia, the Philippines and South Korea are being targeted. "We want to do yoga and Ayurveda programmes as well as Buddhist tours."

While the initial focus for the office has been Asian outbound, STIC also intends to grow its share of Indian inbound to the region from next year. Using Singapore as a base, there could be combinations with Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Goyal Sikri revealed that the company would concentrate on

customised itineraries for FITs and smaller groups, featuring off-the-beaten-track sights.

"For example, every Saturday, all fire stations in Singapore have an open house. People don't know that...For an Indian family to be able to give their child an experience of a fire station, it's something they would not even think of."

"Singapore is already such an established destination for Indians and most end up doing a typical circuit. But Singapore has so much more to offer...Why can't we have more repeat travellers to Singapore (the way Thailand has)?"

STIC's move comes as agencies are being urged to expand their markets beyond their local boundaries, at the same time narrow their product offerings through specialisation.

The call was made by Ho Kwon Ping, executive chairman of Banyan Tree Holdings, who was keynoting Wednesday's National Association of Travel Agents Singapore's Travel Conference (see page 1 article, day 2).

BW ups the game in Asia

By Hannah Koh

BEST Western (BW) International will continue to populate Asia and the Middle East with new properties that have higher minimum standards than its hotels in the West, meeting expectations of Asian guests who now comprise 50 per cent of total guests.

Glenn de Souza, vice president international operations Asia and Middle East, said: "The Asian traveller today is far more demanding and it is difficult to compete with the other hotel brands which are 15-20 years ahead of us in coming to Asia (without having a better product)."

Rooms, for example, must be bigger than 22m² for midscale properties, 26m² for upscale and 32m² for luxury. While guests at the company's North American accommodation carry their own luggage, Asians who are used to having service translates to higher staff-to-room ratio than in the West, at between 0.6 and one person per room.

De Souza expects the mix of Asian guests to increase further as disposable incomes rise

through the region. "Development in China and India is huge and these travellers will be travelling regionally first. Our emphasis is on this part of Asia and all our sales and marketing is geared towards that."

De Souza said the company would likely develop upscale hotels in the Middle East, and midscale and upscale ones in Asia.



De Souza: higher standards

In Asia, BW will add two more hotels in Japan, where it already has 17 properties, before end-2013. In South Korea, where it has nine properties in Seoul, the next hotels will be in Busan and Jeju in the next two to three years, he said.

In ASEAN, where it has been growing rapidly, "we're looking at Mandalay in Myanmar. In Laos, we have a hotel in Vientiane and one which is under construction in Pakse. We are considering a second Vientiane hotel", he said.

De Souza is also eyeing off-beat destinations such as North Korea and Iran, saying the latter's doors would open "pretty soon" once the US trade embargo is lifted.

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SilverNeedle pushes Country Comfort to Asia

SILVERNEEDLE Hospitality has unveiled a refreshed Country Comfort as it prepares to grow the brand beyond Australia and New Zealand to South-east Asia, North and South Asia through franchising, leasing and hotel management.

Currently, there are 23 Country Comforts, 20 of which are in Australia and the remainder in New Zealand.

SilverNeedle Hospitality executive vice president, brands, Sean Flynn, said the brand, targeted at the road warrior, has a new logo and brand promise, 'Rest Today for a More Productive Tomorrow', while its positioning has changed from mid- to upper mid-scale.

Flynn said the new product offering includes a high-quality bed with 1,200 threadcount sheets, a hot breakfast, hassle-free check-in and check-out as well as productive working spaces.

Meanwhile, SilverNeedle Hospitality is running a competition to reward the highest booker among bona fide travel agencies with a three-night stay at any participating hotel.

In addition, all travel bookers will stand a chance to win a three-night stay at any participating hotel in the grand lucky draw. The promotion is ongoing until December 20. – **S. Puvaneswary**

In brief

Experience Iban culture

MALAYSIA's tour operator Planet Borneo Tours & Travel Services and Alvin Leong Academy of Photography have co-created four-day itineraries for photography enthusiasts to capture authentic Iban long-house experiences in the Malaysian state of Sarawak, with fixed departures in April, May, June and August 2014.

Packages start from RM2,319 (US\$734) for eight to 10 pax, including half-board, twin-sharing accommodation, airport transfers, return transport between locations, expert photographic guidance and all taxes.

ZDirect's new tools

EMAIL service provider ZDirect has unveiled new tools. Its recently enhanced ZMail, an eCRM database, equips hoteliers with new ways to optimise resources through hotel marketing automation and big data. The former streamlines workflow by removing redundant tasks, thus improving staff's efficiency; the latter combines the power of massive data with profile and behavioural marketing to create campaigns that it said ups occupancy, revenue and loyalty.

US in fighting form

Training, funding, marketing to regain lost international arrivals

By Hannah Koh

BRAND USA is gunning for more international arrivals through its inaugural appearance at this year's ITB Asia.

Brand USA vice president for global partnership and development, Jay Gray, said: "Between 2000 and 2010, international outbound travel across the world increased immensely, but US market share of that actually decreased five percentage points in what we called the 'lost decade'."

Gray attributed this to the destination's lack of marketing efforts, while other countries were out there marketing themselves as tourism destinations.

But all hope is not lost as outbound departures to the US are on the rise in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines.

The US is aiming for 100 million international arrivals this year, a huge leap from the 67 million recorded last year.

"Travellers and consultants here are not as informed about the product as they could be," he said.

To tackle that, Brand USA

will launch an online education and certification programme for South-east Asia's trade in 1Q2014.

"This is about creating a community of operators with a social element, so when somebody logs

Not all's lost

100

The number, in millions, of foreign arrivals the US targets this year

into this, completes a module, his rankings increase. Then when he goes on one of our fam trips, upload his experiences online, his rankings increase more."

The trade can also expect co-op programmes that could extend to campaign funding.

Said Gray: "For (tour opera-

tors) buying advertisements or promotions around US products, we want to help them, may be in terms of bringing partners to the table that they may not have already talked to, unique itineraries, or just putting additional funds into campaigns."

Rubern Bala, managing director of SR Holidays Singapore, which handles mostly corporate travel, said he is looking to get back into the leisure travel game and sell customised packages to the US.

Bala said there will be demand for the US because of air-links such as Singapore Airlines' non-stop flight to Los Angeles, though he added that the exchange rate will play a big part as well. "Ultimately it's dollars and cents," said Bala.

However, visas remain a key concern. Srauy Virith, managing director of Senses Journeys Travel in Phnom Penh, said: "I'm planning to sell US tour packages but it's hard to get visas. A lot of people want to visit, but even if you have the money, you can't get the visa."

In the dark over Visit Malaysia

By S Puvaneswary

VISIT Malaysia Year (VMY) 2014 is just around the corner but buyers and inbound operators interviewed said they are in the dark about it.

Marcel Khriesheh, chairman and CEO of Otelna, Kuwait, said: "I have not heard of this campaign or seen any promotions on television."

"Many visitors from Kuwait do not know destinations beyond Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Resorts World Genting, Langkawi and Malacca. This could have been a good opportunity to introduce new destinations."

Neeraja Arora, director of Flag Holidays in Delhi, said Malaysia is a value for money destination but what is lacking is knowledge about the destination.

"Many Indians know that Genting Outdoor Theme Park had closed on September 1, but they are not aware of alternative destinations. This VMY campaign could be used by Tourism Malaysia office in Delhi to create more awareness of the destination," Arora said.

But Sonal Swamy, managing director at Syrisa Travels in Mumbai, disagreed, saying Tourism Malaysia office in Mumbai has been "instrumental in helping me learn about destinations

such as Port Dickson, Kuantan and Cherating".

Malaysia is hoping to get an additional two million visitors through VMY 2014, on top of this year's target of 26 million tourist arrivals.

The campaign is also in line with the tourism ministry's ambition to grow yield per tourist, rather than rely on growth in tourist arrivals. The country aims to triple receipts (RM61 billion or US\$19 billion last year) and receive 26 million arrivals by 2020.

Some 50 special events are to be highlighted and promoted as part of VMY but inbound operators said they have not been briefed.

Tourism Malaysia's absence at the show is conspicuous as several inbound operators expressed that it has a lost opportunity to "hype up" the VMY campaign, in the words of Eric Sinnaya, managing director of Morahols Travel, Langkawi.

Sinnaya said: "The idea of creating a VMY is good (but) briefings on the tourism event highlights and new packages should be given to the local trade at least a year in advance so they have time to market and promote it overseas, especially to longhaul markets that need longer lead times."

Wyndham casts Asian net beyond China

By Gracia Chiang

WITH most of its Asian properties now in China, Wyndham Hotel Group is on the prowl for more opportunities elsewhere in the region.

Executive vice president and managing director Asia-Pacific, Duane Elledge, said: "In countries like Vietnam, Myanmar or Indonesia, we think the middle-class population will go through an explosion and our brands will fit well."

This will involve expanding the upscale and family-friendly Howard Johnson, four-/four-and-a-half-star Ramada, economy Days Inn and roadside hotel Super 8, as well as introducing new brands such as the extended stay Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham, boutique TRYP by Wyndham and Wyndham Garden, which is a notch down from the full-service, five-star Wyndham.

In Asia-Pacific, Wyndham has enlarged its footprint aggressively in recent years, growing from 57 hotels in 2005 to 737 currently, of which 85 per cent are in China, followed by India and the Philippines. It hopes to break into Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar where it currently does not have a presence.

"I spend a lot of time looking for multiple-unit deals versus

one owner, one developer. We're kissing a lot of frogs to find the right prince," said Elledge, who will be driving the company's non-China business from December. A new managing director has been hired for China.

However, China will continue to form the bulk of Wyndham's portfolio in the region (70-80 per cent), he admitted, as there is still a lot of potential in the country's western regions. Out of 136 deals, 116 were signed this year for China.

Revealing that there will be close to 200 hotels opening in Asia-Pacific yearly, Elledge said the group intends to leverage its eight million Wyndham Rewards loyalty customers and one million timeshare members globally to fill these rooms.

Asked how Wyndham will be able to compete against other more established operators in the region, he said: "Globally we're big and our brand awareness is high...we're in 67 countries."

Tony Cousens, general manager, Ramada and Days Hotels Singapore At Zhongshan Park, added: "With the rationalisation of travel expenditure these days, be it airline or hotel, being a four- and three-star... we're a good fit for the value-conscious business and leisure traveller."

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Elledge: China's still the bulk



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Charting Asian waters for growth

Prospects are buoyant as more Asians start to see the beauty of cruising. Written by **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**, with reports from **Lee Pei Qi**, **S Puvaneswary**, **Greg Lowe**, **Mimi Hudoyo**, **Prudence Lui** and **Marianne Carandang**

While a string of disasters at sea recently has somewhat taken the shine out of cruising, particularly in the world's biggest cruise market North America, in Asia the waters are anything but murky. With cruise companies reporting healthy increases in the number of Asians getting onboard their ships, expectations that the size of the Asian cruise market will expand to 3.7 million by 2017 are looking within reach. Currently, there are around 1.2 million Asian cruise passengers, according to the 2012 *Cruise Industry News Annual Report*.

Royal Caribbean Cruises Asia-Pacific regional director, Kelvin Tan, said: "The number of our Asian guests have increased by an average of 20 to 30 per cent year-on-year since 2007. As the region grows increasingly affluent, cruise vacations are being viewed as a fresh, alternative holiday option to the traditional land vacation." Eileen Oh, head, marketing & communications, ASA Holidays, said: "Our cruise business has been seeing a healthy year-on-year growth of at least 20 per cent. In



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2012, the total sales figures generated from cruise packages grew almost two-fold compared to 2011, largely spurred by increased take-ups in longer-haul cruises which cost an average of about S\$6,000 (US\$4,730) per person."

Singapore-based Chan Brothers Travel's spokesperson, Michelle Yin, said: "On average, we see a 30 per cent year-on-year increase in demand for regional cruises from Singapore and fly-cruises from port-of-calls beyond Singapore. This trend was evident since 2010, when we started to focus on international or fly-cruises."

Said Imam Syafii, president director of Menara Tudjuh Sembilan, Costa Cruises' GSA in Indonesia: "The regional cruise (business) increased 30 per cent in 2012 from 2011 since Costa Cruises deployed *Costa Atlantica* in Singapore last year. Between 30 and 40 per cent of the market are first-time cruise travellers."

"Indonesia is a sleeping giant. While the longhaul (cruise) traffic will continue to grow it will remain niche, while shorthaul cruise destinations will be big (for Asian passengers)," added Imam, who projected the market to expand a whopping 40 per cent this year.

The beauty of having multiple options

Michael Goh, Star Cruises' senior vice president of sales, said: "Asians enjoy holidays that bring them to several destinations, allowing them to experience different food and cultures all in one go. Cruising offers them the most convenient way of exploring multiple exotic destinations in a single holiday."

Regional cruises are also well-received among Asian travellers who dislike long-haul flights or have tighter budgets. "Asian cruises are attractive to families with young children, first-timers and incentive groups with lower budgets and time limitations," said Sukanya Rattanavadee, GSA general manager, Regale International Travel Thailand.



Ong: demand for shorter cruises

Added Cooper Huang, CEO of Malaysian Harmony Tours & Travel, which sold 100 per cent more South-east Asian cruise packages in 1H2013 than in first-half 2012: "You can take a three-night cruise for below RM2,000 (US\$614), inclusive of city tours."

Huang continued: "Many families with children book these cruises during the school holidays whereas working adults travelling with small groups of friends may take a few days' leave from work to go on a cruise. For the elderly, the attraction is visiting different places without having to lug around luggage."

Abdul Rahman Mohamed, deputy general manager, channel management of Mayflower Acme Tours, promotes *SuperStar Libra*, homeported in Penang, for its easy accessibility. The Kuala Lumpur-based firm recorded a growth of between 15 and 20 per cent in South-east Asian cruising in 1H2013, driven mainly by the Muslim market since the ship launched two halal restaurants – Spices and Blue Lagoon – earlier this year.

He added that most cruise clients were either first-timers or had been on Star Cruises in the past, hence they were usually keen to experience shore excursions in a new destination and facilities on board a "moving five-star hotel".

"Compared with the longhaul market, travellers in the region take cruises because they want to try new big ships which offer more facilities and entertainment on

board than the destination itself," noted Edhi Sutadharma, general manager of Golden Rama Tours & Travel Indonesia, which has set up a separate cruise division to tap the growing cruise market.

Shorter cruises in demand

As Asian travellers warm up to cruising, the trade is seeing a surge in interest for shorter and more affordable itineraries.

"Due to (Asians') lack of familiarity with cruising, they prefer to cruise in South-east Asia as it is closer to home. As a result, they also prefer shorter cruise itin-



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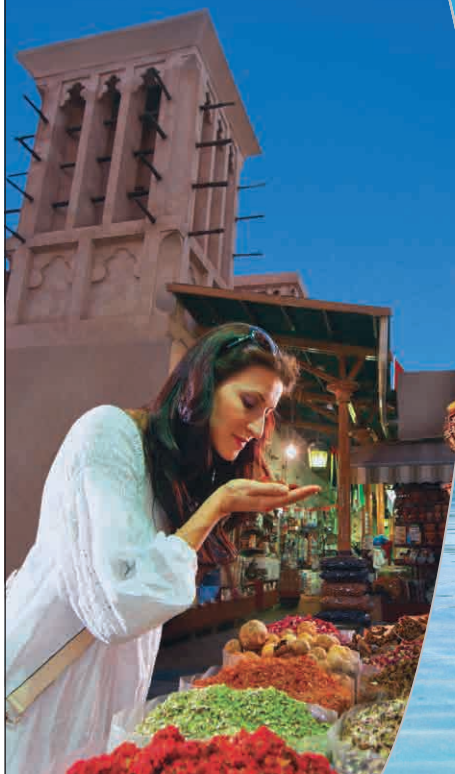
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eraries of three to five days for their first cruise,” said Ong Huey Hong, cruise director, Singapore Tourism Board.

Budget also plays a key consideration as many first-time cruise travellers in Asia do not wish to fork out prices beyond HK\$20,000 (US\$2,579) for European and American cruises, said Kevin So, deputy general manager of Sightseer (HK).

He said: “It’s also typical to see experienced Asians cruise travellers sail in their backyard because they enjoy the cruising experience and look for affordable short-haul trips, for example a six-day journey under HK\$10,000.”

Menara’s Imam added: “The advantage of these short cruises is that travellers can decide on a short getaway at the last minute, provided the cabin is available, since there’s no need for a visa.”

He said short cruises of between three and five nights were a favourite among Indonesian travellers, with the *Costa Victoria* roundtrip Singapore-Penang-Langkawi-Phuket itinerary departing on December 28 as the bestseller since it would berth in Phuket on New Year’s Eve.

As Asian travellers take to the seas in rising numbers, cruise lines are also venturing into more remote waters in the region, steering the course to hitherto less visited destinations like Sabah and Myanmar.

Apart for the popular 4D3N itineraries in its portfolio, Goh said that Star Cruises had rolled out a special 7D6N cruise departing from Penang to Krabi, Yangon and Phuket this month. It would also homeport the 1,511-pax *SuperStar Aquarius* in Kota Kinabalu from November, with calls at Brunei’s Bandar Seri Begawan and Sarawak’s Bintulu, he added.

Meanwhile, Silversea Cruises is devel-



SuperStar Aquarius’ diverse facilities lure multi-generational cruise passengers in Asia

oping new regional itineraries and experiences to attract more Asian travellers. “Three of our ships (*Silver Whisper*, *Silver Shadow* and *Silver Wind*) are returning to Myanmar in 2014 and will each incorporate a special multi-night stay in this mystical and undiscovered destination,” said Asia regional director, Melvyn Yap.

Meetings market growth

While cruises are undeniably suited for leisure travellers, the trade also sees cruise-ships’ strong potential for the MICE market, especially with the recent launch of Marina Bay Cruise Centre Singapore and Hong Kong’s Kai Tak Cruise Terminal.

Star Cruises’ Goh said: “Many corporations see cruising as a great tool for team building, breaking free from traditional land-based venues. The setting out at sea is serene and perfect for brainstorming and exchange of ideas.

“A good number of sizeable corporations as well as special interest groups have organised MICE events onboard *SuperStar Libra*, such as a 4D3N destination cruise for 1,000 guests for an India-based incentive group,” he added.

Said Royal Caribbean Cruises’ Tan: “For Indonesia and India, MICE business makes up almost 50 per cent of our total sales. Incentive travel is a popular trend

for companies in these markets.”

MICE cruises make up a small but growing segment for Jebbsen Travel Hong Kong, according to cruise section assistant sales manager, Crystal Wong. Such cruises were particularly “hot” for investment banks, which would invite their clients and hold seminars on board” she added.

Wally Cervantes, general manager for Arpan Air in the Philippines, remarked that the incentive segment presented immense potential for cruising and that business was only “hindered by the current deployment of ships and how creative the principals are”.

Faraway seas cast their spell on Asians

While Asia is set to be a hotbed for cruising in coming years, a significant number of South-east Asians, particularly the high-end segment, have passed over the opportunity to sail in their own backyard for the distant shores of the Mediterranean, Alaska and the Antarctica, according to cruise experts in the region.

Melvyn Yap, Asia regional director at Silversea Cruises, opined that the desire to explore exotic realms was a key motivator. “A holiday destination that offers a contrast in culture, cuisine and sightseeing than found locally can often appeal. Most South-east Asians are keen to explore a different world from what they are used to,” he said.

Added Sukanya Rattanavadee, GSA general manager of Regale International Travel Thailand: “Most experienced Thai travellers have been to most Asian coun-

tries by land, so they seem to lose interest in returning to the same cities, (where) they can easily travel by themselves probably at lower fares.”

Faraway destinations were deemed more fascinating, she said. “Our most popular cruise destination is Alaska. Thais like to enjoy cool weather, different scenery, especially glaciers and fjords and wildlife.”

Celebrity Cruises’ European and Mediterranean itineraries had sold well among Filipino cruise travellers, said Marilen Yaptangco, president and CEO of Baron Travel. She added: “The US (market) is tired of Alaska, but Asians aren’t – they can’t get enough of it.”

Similarly, Alaskan and Mediterranean cruises are popular among high-income Malaysian travellers, with bookings typically made for one cabin (two people) and

duration lasting one or two weeks, according to Abdul Rahman Mohamed, deputy general manager, channel management of Mayflower Acme Tours Malaysia, which saw a five per cent year-on-year growth in cruises outside Asia in 1H2013.

He added luxury cruiseships such as Silversea, *Queen Elizabeth* and Princess were favoured by high-end customers, but the numbers were limited due to high cruise fees. He said: “To encourage high-end travellers to cruise within Asia, Asian NTOs have to attract more luxury cruises to make Asia their port-of-call.”

WITA Tour Indonesia director of sales and marketing, Rudiana, said: “To the Indonesians, Asian destinations like Singapore, Phuket and Penang are not new; they have been there a number of times before finally deciding on taking the cruise. Generally, people are trying the ships, enjoying the facilities and programmes (on board) rather than choosing a destination.”

More efforts are hence needed to promote regional cruises among Asian travellers, industry experts pointed out.

“Many Asians still have the mindset that cruises are more suitable for retirees or families with young children,” said Eileen Oh, head of marketing & communications at ASA Holidays Singapore. “We are exploring ideas with various stakeholders to reach out to different clientele such as the young adults and luxury travel segments.”

Urging greater efforts to demystify cruising, Tina Cortez, president of Travel People Philippines, remarked: “While pricing is always a key driver to attract

markets, awareness campaigns should address (misconceptions) by highlighting cruising’s unique value propositions: all-inclusive pricing, free entertainment, activities for all members of the family, etc.”

Ong Huey Hong, Singapore Tourism Board cruise director, concurred, adding that many Asians were “surprised” to learn of the diverse offerings available on board and considered cruises to be a “value-for-money vacation choice”.

But getting repeat Asian cruise travellers is a challenge. Rudiana said: “Indonesians want to see many places when they travel and spending more time on the cruiseship is not their type of vacation. Our surveys showed that while the majority of cruise travellers are satisfied and happy with the trip, the repeat level is low.”

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for experienced cruise travellers to opt for destinations beyond Asia for their subsequent vacations, noted Karl Wat, director of sales for Asia, Compagnie Du Ponant Yacht Cruises. “They started with Star Cruises or Costa Cruises from the outset, which helped nurture a group of mature clientele (heading further afield for their cruises),” he said.

Improving shore excursions is hence key to raise the allure of regional cruises. Ground operators could operate tours in various Asian languages, for example, Regale’s Sukanya suggested.

Developing supporting infrastructure and improving awareness of cruises and training across the travel trade would help convince more Asians to cruise within the region, added Silversea’s Yap.



Mediterranean itineraries such as a Silversea cruise of Italy’s Portofino appeal to Asian travellers for their novelty factor

What are cruise lines doing to woo Asians?



Michael Goh, senior vice president, sales, Star Cruises: "We have revamped and expanded retail space across our fleet and partnered with well-known retail brands such as China Duty Free and Milan Station.

Asian guests have developed a passion for themed cruises. Our ships adopt different themes every month to keep guest experiences fresh. For example, *SuperStar Virgo* launched a Korean and Thai theme in March and April respectively for guests to enjoy different activities and speciality cuisines.

During the Korean Wave promotion, we highlighted Korean food, pop music, arts & crafts and activities to offer guests an all-encompassing Korean experience.

SuperStar Virgo also collaborated with Tourism Authority of Thailand to invite Thai guest chefs on board the vessel and create authentic Thai food for our guests."



Kelvin Tan, regional director, Asia-Pacific, Royal Caribbean Cruises: "Royal Caribbean has enhanced a number of elements on our cruises to suit our Asian guests. We

offer language assistance with crew on-board who are fluent in Asian languages like Chinese, Korean and Japanese. Our signages and daily programme sheets are available in these languages as well.

Our menus also offer a wide selection of Asian cuisines from Chinese to Indian and Indonesian, and include dishes like fish curry and Asian duck. Our entertainment programmes on board are also suited for Asians' tastes, like karaoke with Asian songs, Bingo games and line dancing classes."



Marnie Whipple, regional sales manager, Asia-Pacific, Crystal Cruises: "Crystal Cruises is doubling its visits in Asia next year with two ships – *Crystal Symphony* and *Crystal Serenity* – deployed to the region. For those who prefer shorthaul flights, we have many local choices including Hong Kong to Singapore on February 22, 2014.

With the tremendous success of our group promotions this year, we will continue to offer in 2014 the Family Memories Programme, in which one guest sails free for every 10 full-fare adults, and guests receive US\$200 shipboard credit per person in the Share the Experience shipboard credit promotion.

We have planned more segmented voyages to cater to Asian travellers as they have shorter holidays compared with Europeans or Americans.

For example, we have arranged two segments for a 12-day itinerary in 2014 as a seven-day voyage from Yokohama to Shanghai and a five-day voyage from Shanghai to Hong Kong.

With increasing numbers of mainland Chinese travellers on board, we have added 'Chinese comfort food' to *Crystal Serenity's* Tastes café, serving a menu of traditional Chinese food such as steamed dumplings, noodles, soups, fried rice and vegetables."

Buhdy Bok, senior vice president Pacific Asia & China, Costa Cruises: "Costa Cruises offers shorter options for Asian guests to cruise the region without taking long flights. For example, *Costa Victoria* offers



three-, four-, five- and seven-night itineraries from Singapore to Bali, Lombok, Semarang, Penang, Kuantan, Malacca, Langkawi, Koh Samui and Phuket.

We also offer a range of complimentary cuisines featuring uniquely Asian dishes and staple food such as kimchi, chicken rice and fried noodles in our fine-dining restaurants on board. Service staff speak-

ing Korean, Japanese and Chinese are available; menus and daily programmes are also translated into local languages. Local entertainment such as mahjong is also available. Culture and needs are priority considerations for Costa Cruises. We look at shorter itineraries and choice of food, and we tailor both onboard and offshore activities."



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Paying selective attention

With tighter funds for 2014, Indonesia is focusing its marketing on key markets, writes **Mimi Hudoyo**



More of Indonesia's destinations, such as Borobudur Temple in Central Java, are being promoted in selected source markets

The Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has identified China, Russia, Singapore, Malaysia and India as key source markets that will receive the bulk of its marketing efforts come 2014, when the country trims the coffers of all its government agencies to fund next year's elections. The tourism authority's budget for 2014 will be almost halved, from Rp160 billion (US\$14.2 million) this year to some Rp88 billion. The weakening rupiah will inflict an additional blow to the ministry, as "the (in-market)

marketing budget, which is in foreign currency, will decrease", according to minister Mari Elka Pangestu. However, there might be a chance for the ministry to apply for additional funds for "new initiatives", revealed Pangestu. In response to the tourism budget cut and poor world economic health, the ministry has revised its arrivals target from 10 million to 9.5 million. Pangestu said the global economic crisis was projected to continue into next year and that would dampen travel sentiments. She added that the ministry

would focus on a "low budget, high impact" strategy by working closely with the travel industry to keep Indonesia top of mind among travellers. Director of international promotions, Nia Niscaya, told the *Daily*: "We will focus on major travel marts such as ITB Berlin, but will cut down on overseas festivals. We will also forge partnerships with organisations such as financial institutions, mobile communication operators, transportation companies and hotels to create joint marketing programmes." Niscaya added that she is now

in talks with a Chinese bank in Indonesia to jointly organise a sales mission to six cities in China in November. "(The bank) can probably pay for the venues and we handle the (booth) construction. In return, (the bank) can participate in some of our events in Indonesia to gain more brand awareness," she said. The ministry's move to partner the private sector in destination marketing has so far yielded a collaboration with Accor and Pegasus Touristik to promote Bali and other Indonesian destinations in Moscow on September 17. The arrangement saw Pegasus Touristik handling buyers attendance, Accor providing the event venue and dinner and the ministry bringing in cultural performances. "Pegasus Touristik was hosting a wholesalers meeting there and we wanted to take the opportunity to also promote Solo and Jogjakarta as heritage destinations," she said. Marintur executive director, Ismail Ali, recommends partnerships between the tourism ministry and other government agencies to market Indonesia together. "Travellers today do not only travel for leisure, but are also looking for business and investment opportunities overseas.

It will be good to have the tourism authority joining forces with the Ministry of Industry and the investment board to promote Indonesia." "We will need to join forces next year (by inviting) the travel industry to do more joint promotion activities and produce promotional materials that we can use together. We would also like the Indonesia Tourism Promotion Board to take up promotional activities (that the Ministry) does not handle, such as off-season programmes." **Mari Elka Pangestu**
Minister, Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy

Viewpoints

Indonesia

Compiled by Mimi Hudoyo

What is your business outlook for the next six months?

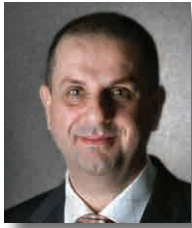
What does Indonesia need in order to compete well?

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



Marc Steinmeyer
President director
Tauzia Hotel Management

I expect some slowdown in Indonesia's hotel development due to room oversupply in some cities, poor global economic health, potential contraction of the US dollar value and the national elections next year. All provinces, especially Jakarta, Surabaya and Bali, must be serious about promoting tourism to the domestic and international markets. Greater professionalism in initiatives and a clearer vision and strategy are needed. I have two: manpower, especially at the management level; and the ability of some hotel owners in paying back their loans (taken for development) due to hotel oversupply, (economic) slowdown and increment in bank (interest) rates.



Emmanuel Guillard
Senior vice president operations & development
Indonesia, Malaysia & Vietnam, Swiss-Belhotel International

In line with our aggressive expansion policy, we are aiming to add at least five hotels in Java and Bali to our portfolio by end-2013. The year had started a little slowly but...we are expecting a stronger performance for 2H2013. Infrastructure development is needed to support tourism (growth) across the archipelago, as well as an introduction of the industry to local traditions and the way tourism impacts the life of local people. Bali is becoming extremely competitive, with the arrival of several new hotels over the last two years. Once the new airport is completed, Bali will need to increase its number of flights (to fill the island's many hotel beds).



Renato Domini
Managing director
Asia World Indonesia

1H2013 has been good, but we are seeing fluctuating business for the second half. July was down 50 per cent over the same month last year, while August and September were up 35 and 40 per cent respectively. (Overall), we will do well. The government's marketing efforts have improved over the last two years but we are still lacking in promotional materials. It would also help if the government could support familiarisation trips. My main concern is with the elections next year. I also hope that the Indonesian rupiah will stabilise, as that will benefit the Indonesian economy.



Herman Rukmanadi
President director
Bhara Tour

We will see better business from Thailand, Europe and South Africa. More Europeans are going to different islands in Indonesia, while Singapore Airlines and SilkAir are allowing us to package Bali and Jogjakarta for the South Africans. We need better tourism infrastructure such as airports, roads and public transportation. It requires a lot of investment, but the government can start with the 16 destinations that they have earmarked for tourism development. Bandung is becoming more popular... but its infrastructure is not developing and traffic congestion is getting worse. I'm worried that we may lose tourists because of this.



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Quest to stay evergreen

As visitors arrive in bigger numbers, Thailand needs to tackle tourism issues to remain popular. By **Greg Lowe**

Driven by surging arrivals from Asian markets, most notably China, Thailand's tourism industry is booming, with the number of inbound visitors almost doubling from January to July.

Tourism Authority of Thailand is expected to exceed this year's target of 22.2 million international arrivals and foreign exchange revenues of 966 billion baht (US\$30.9 billion). For 2014, the NTO is aiming for 28 million arrivals with an international tourist revenue of 1.3 trillion baht and a domestic revenue of 700 billion baht, marking the first time the combined target has topped two trillion baht.

From January to July 2013, the top five source markets – China (2.7 million), Malaysia (1.6 million), Russia (986,215), Japan (852,241) and South Korea (720,382) – accounted for 45.8 per cent of all arrivals to Thailand. Two-thirds of visitors originated within Asia, followed by Europe (24.7 per cent) and the Americas (4.5 per cent). During the same period, strongest year-on-year growth was shown by China (90.3 per cent), Brunei (43.7 per cent), Indonesia (40.9 per cent), Russia (36.5 per cent) and Myanmar (35.9 per cent).

The number of Chinese tour-



The marine diversity of Koh Chang, like other beach destinations in Thailand, is a strong drawcard for tourists

ists to Thailand this year has risen steeply, in part catalysed by the Chinese hit movie *Lost in Thailand* and in part due to the ongoing territorial disputes between China and Japan over the Senkaku Islands, which has dented travel between the two countries.

Since October 1, China has

rolled out a new tourism law to curb outbound zero-based tours that lure Chinese tourists to Thailand and other destinations with cheap prices only for operators to earn significant commissions through other tours and shopping excursions.

While some operators are concerned over how the policy

“In 2014, we have set a conceptual framework ‘Higher Revenue Through Thainess’. We hope the private sector will make an all-out effort to upgrade the quality of its human resources and working conditions so that the industry continues to attract quality visitors.”

Suraphon Svetasreni
Governor
Tourism Authority of Thailand

eral manager of Standard Tour, expected the new law would have little effect on the lucrative Chinese inbound market, even if it dented arrivals for the first month or two, or on the business quality of tour operators.

Overall, intra-Asia travel is helping smooth out the peaks and troughs between high and low seasons, resulting in more stable year-round business, said Michael Lynden-Bell, general manager of Exotissimo Travel Thailand.

He remarked: “This year has been very good for Thailand in terms of total number of tourism arrivals. Much of this growth is coming from the Chinese and Russian markets alone, but high-value markets like Western Europe and Australia are stable in terms of arrivals.”

“Even in what used to be called the ‘low season’, the country is still busy with tourism and doing well,” Lynden-Bell added.

However, tourist arrivals are not the only things on the rise. Unfortunately crime, attacks on foreigners – especially in Phuket – and rail and road accidents are also on the up, according to Andre van der Marck, general manager of Khiri Travel Thailand, who urged authorities to urgently address these problems.

Viewpoints

Thailand

Compiled by
Greg Lowe

What is your business outlook for the next six months?

What does Thailand need in order to compete well?

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



Lothar R Pehl
Senior vice president of operations and global initiatives
Starwood Hotels and Resorts Asia Pacific

We are seeing a very positive outlook for our hotels in Thailand and anticipate a strong year-round performance. We are seeing growing demand (for our hotels), primarily driven by short-haul Asian markets, particularly from China.

Thailand still has a lot for tourists to uncover. There's great potential to further promote new destinations, especially in second- and third-tier cities such as Khon Kaen, Chiang Rai, Nakhon Phanom or Sukhothai.

Global tourism performance is also dependent on global economies and political stability. With globalisation of business, rising wealth and a more digitally connected world, we remain very positive with our outlook and performance.



Patrick Basset
Senior vice president for Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines
Accor Asia Pacific

We had a healthy start to the year and our hotels, especially those in Bangkok, have seen a very positive July and August. If the political situation stays stable, we are confident the next six months will yield comparable results to last year.

Thailand has rebounded quickly from each crisis without serious long-term consequences. We hope the political environment remains stable and Thailand will grow as one of Asia's top destinations.

Our biggest challenge in Thailand is still an oversupply of hotel rooms leading to low rates, especially in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hua Hin and Samui, the shortage of manpower, and the airport infrastructure which needs improvement.



Kubilay Atac
General manager
Pegas Touristik (Thailand)

Our expectations are still high for the coming six months given the existing situation (of strong tourism growth). On the other hand, it really depends on what could happen in Thailand (in terms of politics).

As a country with many destinations, Thailand has something to offer all customer types. But some destinations such as Phuket should improve its attitude toward tourists and hotel rate policies.

Local business skills and expectations would be much better if authorities could come together to combat corruption as well as look at the needs of hospitality businesses and help them run operations more smoothly.



Michael Lynden-Bell
General manager
Exotissimo Travel Thailand

The coming high season looks very positive. FIT business is doing well for the next six months and we have already confirmed several MICE groups for early 2014; we are working on a few big quotes at the moment.

Thailand remains a popular destination but pricing becomes the main issue during decision-making. However, Thailand still offers good value for money, especially when compared with Myanmar.

The availability of hotels is becoming tougher, especially during high season at popular destinations like Phuket and Samui. We are also seeing a lot more demand for other tourism resources like buses and guides.

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Access woe stifles trade

Tourism performance on the rise, but a congested NAIA is the Philippines' bane. By **Rosa Ocampo**

Philippine tourism is spotting double-digit growth on all fronts, with foreign arrivals rising 11 per cent year-on-year to 2.4 million in 1H2013, but the country's primary airport cannot cope with the growth.

Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) is congested, and the travel industry is urging a speedy resolution to the situation, which has disabled some airlines from flying or increasing their frequencies due to a lack of slots for landing and takeoff. Trade players warned that NAIA's predicament would impact the country's ambitious tourism targets and undermine the huge investments in tourism.

SEAIR International president and CEO, Avelino Zapanta, believes that the 10 million foreign arrivals targeted for 2016 will be difficult to meet. In the opinion of Claro Cordero, Jones Lang LaSalle head of research, consulting and valuation advisory services, an arrival target of seven to eight million is more realistic.

Zapanta and other industry players have recommended solutions to decongest NAIA, including the development of Clark International Airport so that foreign airlines might be enticed to transfer there or use it



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for their additional flights, and to develop eight provincial airports as secondary gateways into the country.

As NAIA has no more space for expansion, other trade players such as Philippine Airlines president Ramon Ang and Philippine Travel Agencies Association president John Paul Cabalza have suggested moving the Manila airport to a larger site with room for expansion.

Meanwhile, arrival figures are expected to hold steady – or even surpass expectations – this year as foreign tourists are now allowed to stay in the Philippines for up to 30 days without visa. Before this new regulation was implemented on August 1, foreigners were only allowed to stay for a maximum of 21 days without visa.

Another confidence booster came in August when Taiwan

lifted its economic sanction, including the ban on travel to the Philippines, when the latter finally apologised for the death of a Taiwanese fisherman in Philippine waters. From being the destination's fifth biggest source market, Taiwan slipped to sixth place as a result of the three-month travel ban.

Another positive development is the European Union's move to strike Philippine Airlines (PAL)

“We want (the private sector) to get involved in improving product quality. (Those who are not in the tourism sector) may want to consider putting their money in (this) lucrative business...”

Ramon Jimenez
Tourism secretary

off its list of banned airlines – carriers that are deemed non-compliant with EU air safety regulations. PAL is now preparing to mount services to various points in the continent beginning late this year and European carriers are expected to return to the Philippines.

In the hotel sector, investors are responding to the tourism boom by building new properties – from budget to deluxe – leading to a 37 per cent hike in new room inventory by 2016.

New attractions are also being built all over the country, from integrated resorts to theme parks and sports facilities.

Viewpoints

The Phillippines

Compiled by
Rosa Ocampo

What is your business outlook for the next six months?

What does The Philippines need in order to compete well?

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



Bruce Winton
General manager
Marriott Manila Hotel

Overall business has been strong, partly driven by foreign investments in the Business Process Outsourcing sector and stronger arrivals. But the outlook will moderate as global economic and political instability have risen slightly in recent weeks.

The airport is the first and last impression of the Philippines. I know plans (to improve it) are underway and we are all looking forward to them coming to fruition gradually over the next couple of years.

No major concerns per se. We are focused on delivering a five-star experience for all who come to the Philippines, which is not difficult with the tremendous people we have working here.



Nichelle Clemente
Head, product management
Far East Travel Agency

There's a growing interest in the destination, but the profits of travel agencies are being affected by hotels and resorts going directly to travellers and by travellers booking directly with online travel agencies.

We need more world-class hotels and tourist-friendly facilities. Accessibility also needs to be addressed – we have great tourist attractions in Palawan that are accessible only by helicopters.

The destination's limited supply of world-class hotels, accessibility and tourist-friendly facilities. Ninoy Aquino International Airport continues to be a challenge, but they (the government) are addressing the issue.



Eugene Tamesis
Director of sales and marketing
Raffles Makati and Fairmont Makati

Very promising as we are entering the peak period. Overall hotel revenue expectation is positive given the projected growth in MICE, FIT and F&B figures. Both hotels are expected to be (at their best performance) in the next six months.

It needs to address airlift (increase), add world-class attractions and entertainment venues to complement the islands' natural beauty, and (work) with public and private stakeholders to create offers that encourage greater tourist spend.

To improve RevPAR index amid increasing demand and competition, optimise all revenue streams for our three properties, achieve market parity by yearend, as well as sustain business levels and continuous growth in 2014.



Rosanna Banagale
Marketing agent/group sales officer
Janddy Tours Inc.

I foresee an increase in the volume of foreign visitors to the Philippines.

The Philippines needs to preserve its natural attractions. This is beneficial for all of us in the long run, as tourists will continue to come and jobs will be available to Filipinos.

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Keeping products fresh

MGTO is banking on diversified products and experiences to achieve stronger arrivals, says **Prudence Lui**

Due to the economic downturn in Europe, Macau has anticipated these few years to be a period of adjustments. Growth of total tourism arrivals to the city was a mere 0.3 per cent last year, hitting 28.1 million. While the Macau Government Tourist Office (MGTO) will be maintaining its current promotional efforts, it will readjust its work plan according to the economic conditions. Arrivals to Macau in the first six months of 2013, however, went up a positive 4.2 per cent to about 14.1 million visitors. China took the lead with 8.9 million arrivals, followed by Hong Kong (3.4 million), Taiwan (458,072), South Korea (226,133) and the Philippines (141,878). Arrivals from Japan recorded the highest drop of 32.8 per cent while those from Thailand surged highest at 23 per cent.

MGTO director, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, said: “Tourism is an industry highly affected by the economic environment, so we have to be realistic. MGTO keeps working at diversifying tourism products, through organising different kinds of events, such as the 25th Macau International Fireworks Display Contest and the Chinese Lunar New Year Parade. We are also adding new elements to our tourism products.

“We have been developing community and cultural tour-



Explore Macau's heritage; St. Lawrence's Church pictured here

ism to enrich our products. For instance, we have introduced the *Development Plan for Community Tourism* in collaboration with local associations. The plan includes the publication of guidebooks, (organising of) cultural festivals and development of tourism information systems.”

Fernandes said MGTO would continue working with other departments for ways to better lev-

erage on Macau's historical and cultural settings.

However, in spite of all the opportunities and potential for tourism development, Macau is facing a number of challenges, such as limited international air routes, overcrowding at tourist hotspots and shortage of taxis.

Hence, MGTO hopes to divert the flow of tourists from the city centre and famous tourist spots

to “hidden sites” which are just a stone's throw away.

Fernandes added: “Macau is small even though (land) reclamation is on-going. If we want visitors to stay longer, we need to work with the region to attract visitors. MGTO will continue to strengthen its cooperation with different airline companies to open up new routes, thus expanding visitor source markets.

Meanwhile, hotels recorded an average room rate of US\$179.50, up 1.4 per cent, whereas occupancy rate dropped two percentage points to 79.6 per cent.

Hotel Lisboa, general manager, Samuel Yeung, observed that Macau's tourism business had slowed down in the first few months but started picking up again from May.

He said: “So far, it (the industry's overall performance) has been within my expectations. For the rest of 2013, business is projected to be stable. In fact, most of the hotels have done pretty well in the last two months and the average room rate has gone up compared to the first four months of the year.”

In 1H2013, Galaxy Macau recorded 90 per cent occupancy on average and its restaurants were booked out fairly quickly during peak seasons. The hotel's spokesman said: “The main challenge Macau faces is the sheer demand from leisure and MICE travellers. Macau's popularity as a destina-

“We hope the trade will consider creating packages with our new and diversified components, or promote multi-destination tours that include Hong Kong and Guangdong.”

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes
Director
Macau Government Tourist Office

tion is growing year by year, with over 28 million people visiting in 2012, and it is one of the government's top priorities to continue growing the MICE segment.”

Cotai Strip Macao executive director of MICE marketing, Natasha Tomé, said: “Macau's tourism performance is well within my expectations. With continual infrastructural improvements and the introduction of new activities, I am seeing a marked increase in visitors this year to Macau. We remain confident that the current (construction) work on the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and the Macau light rail system, (coupled with) improved efficiency for border crossings, will enhance visitors' experience in Macau.”

Viewpoints

Macau

Compiled by
Prudence Lui

What is your business outlook for the next six months?

What does Macau need in order to compete well?

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



Irene Wong
Executive director of sales and guest services, MGM Macau

Business will remain strong. The final quarter is always a busy time for the hotel, due to plenty of corporate events and (festive) celebrations. Moreover, Macau Grand Prix is celebrating its 60th anniversary with major events in November.

Improvement in overall infrastructure is important for Macau to handle an increasing visitor arrival.

It is difficult to find experienced talents, especially in the managerial level. The staff turnover rate is especially high after the Chinese New Year, as employees tend to leave in search of other job opportunities.



Gary Warnock
General manager
The Westin Macau Resort

We will be very busy. Besides handling the usual major events in October and November, we will also be undergoing a number of renovation projects throughout the property, including full guestroom renovations.

I believe that offering a partner programme (for MICE delegates) will encourage them to come to Macau with more people and extend their stays (after the event).

Many hotels in Macau have job vacancies to fill, and with all the new properties due to come online in the next couple of years, the (manpower) situation will only get worse.



Lu Fang
Deputy general manager
CITS Macau

We are unsure and still observing the impact of the Chinese government's move to tighten public servants' entertainment expenses. This impacts business travel (from China). It seems that these controls will stay for 2H2013.

Macau has too many tourists, which is causing many problems in transportation and human resource. Macau should resolve these issues and ensure our Chinese visitors are well taken care of, instead of courting more international tourists.

The new Chinese tourism laws, implemented on October 1, may pose far-reaching impact on outbound tours to Hongkong and Macau. However, the law will raise the quality of tourism, and that is good news for us.

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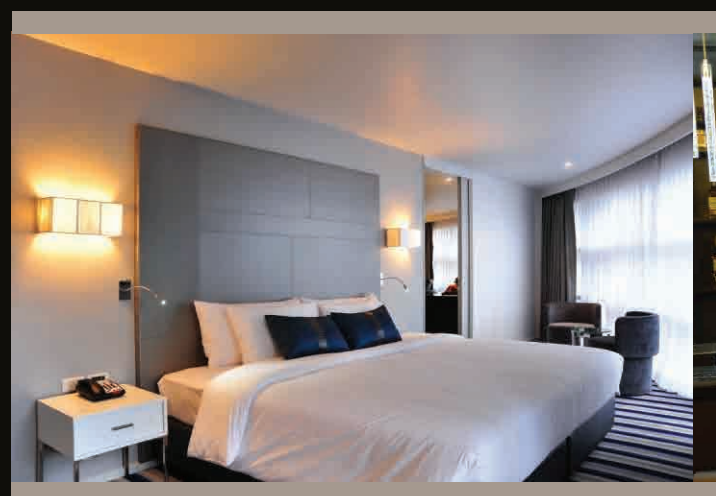


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A worthy harvest

Tourism 2020 continues to enjoy sturdy government, trade support, writes **Karen Yue**

Nearly four years after Australia's Tourism 2020 plan was set in motion to grow the economic contribution of the tourism sector, Tourism Australia's managing director Andrew McEvoy said the campaign is bearing fruit with continued growth in key areas including domestic and international aviation and tourist spend.

According to the Australia Bureau of Statistics, the country welcomed 6.3 million short term international visitors in the 12 months to June 2013. This was a rise of almost five per cent and the strongest growth since 2004/2005.

Commenting on the destination's tourism performance, Karyn Kent, regional general manager, South/South-east Asia & Gulf of Tourism Australia, said: "We are very pleased with the numbers so far and optimistic about the rest of the year."

"Given fierce international competition, a strong Australian dollar and economic fragility in

a number of our traditional high volume markets, this is a very creditable performance."

Kent added that Asia remains Tourism Australia's "key focus".

She said: "While China continues to be the engine of growth, other Asian markets are becoming increasingly important for us in 2013 and beyond – India, In-

"We will partner more than 20 airlines next year to further grow profitable capacity to Australia (and) continue with our global campaign, There's nothing like Australia."

Karyn Kent
Regional general manager, South/South-east Asia & Gulf
Tourism Australia

donesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam. Eight of Australia's top 10 visitor markets now lie within the Asia-Pacific rim.

"The Australian tourism industry is reaping the benefits of this Asian Century and Tourism Australia recognises this by substantially increasing our marketing activities in Asia's new and emerging economies."

Indeed, the tourism body's courtship of Asian travellers is well support by the federal government, state and territory governments and industry.

Said McEvoy: "The establishment of the Asia Marketing Fund is a great example of where action has been taken to grow demand from Asia where rapidly growing middle classes are travelling in increasing numbers."

"The A\$48.5 million (US\$43.8 million) Tourism Australia will receive over the next four years from the fund has allowed us to do more in Asia including increasing the speed at which we're expanding into new regions in

China – our fastest growing and most valuable inbound market."

Meanwhile, according to Kent, Tourism Australia has secured strategic marketing deals with several key Asian airlines including China's three largest carriers – China Southern, China Eastern and Air China – as well as Singapore Airlines.

The destination is also courting investors to back tourism through a five-year partnership between Tourism Australia, the federal government's tourism department and the Australian Trade Commission.

In addition, the government has been issuing tourism grants, with the latest being a A\$141 million investment in regional tourism announced in March through the Regional Tourism Investment Fund Grants Program (TIRF). Projects funded through the first round of TIRF include new and upgraded accommodation as well as new attractions such as adventure trails and MICE facilities.



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Tourism Australia gains a boost in its destination marketing efforts through the Asia Marketing Fund; Sydney pictured here



Viewpoints

Australia

Compiled by
Karen Yue

What is your business outlook for the next six months?

What does your destination need in order to compete well?

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



Alexandra Walsh
Director of sales & marketing
Sheraton On The Park, Sydney

Slower growth in the corporate travel and MICE market (due to weaker economic outlook). The decline in the...Australian dollar will...(drive) growth in the domestic market which is pacing in a similar trend line to 2012/2013.

Sydney needs to respond to the improvement in the standard of equivalent facilities in Australia and Asia-Pacific if the city is to realise its full potential in the convention and exhibition markets.

The Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre will close its doors for three years from December 2013 (for) a billion-dollar redevelopment. Sydney will be deemed as a venue unable to hold large MICE (events). However, various alternative venues have been implemented across Sydney.



Leon Thomson
Director of sales & marketing
Sheraton Mirage Gold Coast Resort & Spa, Queensland

Enquiries are strong, however advance booking pace is a little slower than the same time last year. Short lead bookings are up, so overall business volume is expected to remain unchanged.

Consistent product and service quality standards for accommodation, transportation and dining, especially when (Australia is) being compared with other mature Asian destinations such as Hong Kong and Singapore.

There appears to be a recent trend towards reducing general MICE budgets – particularly F&B spend – and we will be watching closely to see if this is only for the short term or will continue and become the norm. Our concern is that some revenue streams may then decline.

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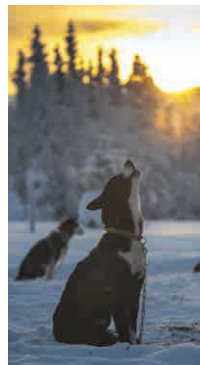
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Finland taps its Polar forces to woo Asians



Paterson: Finnair sees strong growth from the Far East. Above, Finland's Northern Lights remains its stellar attraction for Asian visitors; right, huskies are often used for sled tours in Finnish Lapland

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Each winter, when the Arctic night skies light up with auras – also known as northern lights – hordes of Japanese and Chinese tourists flock to Lapland in northern Finland to watch the spectacular phenomenon, shared Finnair's media relations director, Paivyt Tallqvist.

Indeed, Japan has become the top Asian source market for Finland, which welcomed 176,936

Japanese tourists in 2012, a rise of 20 per cent from 2011, according to statistics from Finnish Tourist Board (MEK). Japanese visitors also chalked up the highest daily spend at 126 euros (US\$168), a significant amount above the average expenditure of 59 euros per day for foreign travellers in 2012.

At the same time, China has rapidly emerged as a source market for this Nordic nation too. Last year, Chinese arrivals

reached 100,075, up 8.7 per cent from 92,099 in 2011.

The rise of these two Far Eastern countries as visitor source markets has prompted MEK to reassess its previously Europe-centric marketing strategy.

Mervi Holmén, MEK's director of nation brand and marketing, said: "We will not pull out from Europe as it is still very important for us in the future, but our marketing emphasis will

be stronger in Russia, Japan and parts of China from the beginning of next year."

Shanghai, Chongqing, Beijing and Hong Kong – also destinations that Finnair flies to – have been identified as MEK's focal cities in Greater China. The NTO is "negotiating joint activities and marketing campaigns with Finnair", according to Holmén; further details will be unveiled in September when the board finalises its marketing plans.

As the flag carrier and largest airline of Finland, Finnair is a key player in attracting Asian travellers to the country and will work with the tourism authorities where its objectives are "aligned", such as selling Lapland as a destination for the outbound segment in Japan, according to the airline's senior vice president commercial, Allister Paterson.

He quipped: "Finland wants to bring people to Finland, whereas we want to bring people to Helsinki, then either have them stay in Finland or elsewhere in Europe."

Having rolled out an Asian-centric strategy with plans to double its revenue from Asia-Europe traffic by 2020 from a 2010 baseline, Finnair continues to leverage its Helsinki base to tap growth opportunities in Asia-Europe traffic.

Earlier this month, Finnair began thrice-weekly flights to Xi'an and Hanoi, becoming the first European airline to connect these cities and bumping up its Asian destinations to 13. Xi'an is the airline's fourth destination in China, following Shanghai, Beijing and Chongqing.

Said Finnair deputy CEO, Ville Iho: "North Asia-North Europe is the sweet spot for Finnair. Going via Helsinki saves four hours on average, an important consideration for business travellers."

Paterson agreed: "The Asia-centric approach works better for the Far East markets...The majority of our growth and revenue over the last couple of years has been from Asia."

Second-tier cities in China are clearly on Finnair's development radar, Paterson pointed out. "We're the first ones into Chongqing and Xi'an from Europe as a non-stop (service). These cities are secondary markets but they are big – Chongqing has 30 million people."

"We are seeing good load factor on our Asian routes, although they are lower on developing markets like Chongqing and Xi'an...Not everyone knows the Polar route, so we need to teach geography (to the travel trade). There is a lot of growth left in Asia, which we plan to grow."

However, further network expansion in Asia will be restricted until the airline starts to take delivery of its 11 Airbus A350 aircraft order in 2015, according to Iho. Finnair's executives declined to reveal new destinations on the company's radar.

Qatar Airways' and SriLankan Airlines' upcoming entry into Oneworld will also enable Finnair to extend its reach, said Paterson.

However, MEK has no plans to ramp up its presence or marketing efforts in India or South-east Asia at the moment "due to limited resources", Holmén revealed.

Sunny Asian market for Switzerland

By Raini Hamdi

Switzerland Tourism expects five to 10 per cent additional visitors from Singapore and Australia as a result of Swiss International Air Lines' (SWISS) direct daily Singapore-Zurich service, which took off on May 13.

The NTO has set aside "a special budget" to promote Switzerland in both markets, according to Switzerland Tourism's executive vice president, Urs Eberhard.

"We have seen time and again that every direct connection into our country brings five to 10 per cent additional visitors," Eberhard said.

Arved von zur Muhlen, SWISS' head of sales & marketing-Intercontinental, noticed "a shift" in Australian visitors using Hong Kong as gateway to Europe, to Singapore, as a result of the Singapore-Zurich service. "Now that we have started this service, our customers from Australia who flew Australia-Hong Kong-Europe are now flying Australia-Singapore-Europe. It may balance out over time, but this is what we're seeing now. This is not an issue, as it means we have more seats for our Hong

Kong customers," he said.

Australia is a growth market for Switzerland, as is the whole South-east Asian region.

"The direct Singapore-Zurich service is an important trigger. If you fly to London, Paris or Rome (to tour Europe), you might or might not visit Switzerland, but if you fly to Zurich, you are likely to spend some time in the country before going on, adding overnights for us," Eberhard said. Zurich, along with Luzern and Geneva, is the most popular destination among South-east Asian visitors, he added.

South-east Asia, which Eberhard said had been "a success story for us from 2008 to 2012", is on track to contribute some 500,000 overnights in Switzerland by 2016, from 350,000 overnights now. "That's a year-on-year increase of 10-20 per cent, depending on the South-east Asian market. Indonesia is hot on the heels of Thailand in growth, but Singapore remains by far the most important market, which was why we opened our office here in June last year."

The average spend of South-east Asian visitors in Switzerland



Kurt Ruffli



Eberhard: Expects more success from South-east Asia. Left, a Singapore traveller hikes up Obersteinberg – Switzerland Tourism aims to create more "immersive" tours for seasoned Asians

is around CHF350 (US\$379) per day, which is 30 to 50 per cent higher than the average spend of Chinese visitors, according to Eberhard.

His plan is to target more seasoned travellers from South-east Asia – as well as China – in a bid to improve yield.

Switzerland Tourism is working with agencies in South-east

Asia and land operators in Switzerland to create new products and itineraries that go beyond Swiss icons such as the Jungfrau, Titlis, Lucern and Interlaken.

"We hear from the agencies that their discerning travellers want deeper experiences, so together with the agencies, we're trying to create new icons in, say, the eastern parts of Switzerland,

where there is a lot of century-old traditions and colourful festivals their clients can enjoy.

"It's a mix of us getting an education on what Asians want and us giving new ideas to the travel agencies. We are coming up with seven to eight new itineraries which we hope can be in the programme in 2014," Eberhard said.

Switzerland Tourism has given the Asian market a lot more focus since 2008, when the impact of the US and European debt-crisis started to bite its visitorship from traditional markets.

Eberhard said in the end Swiss travellers themselves saved the day. "We were extremely afraid that the strong Swiss franc would cause Swiss travellers to abandon Switzerland and holiday in Italy, France, etc. But the domestic market has been stable – if it had left us, that would have been a problem. The domestic market is 33 to 34 per cent of the total market."

"This attests to the quality and value they get in a Switzerland holiday, which visitors from Australia and South-east Asia recognise as well," he said.

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Britain trains sights on China, India

By Greg Lowe

VisitBritain, the national tourism agency of the UK, will focus on growing emerging outbound markets such as China, India and the Middle East as a key strategy to reach its target of 40 million tourist arrivals and an expenditure of £31.5 billion (US\$42 billion) by 2020.

The Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa (APMEA) market is expected to account for two million of the targeted nine million visitor arrival increase to Britain by 2020, contributing £1.9 billion of the anticipated £12.8 billion rise in inbound tourism spending.

While the US and Australia remain core visitor source markets for Britain, VisitBritain is increasingly looking east for long-term sustainable growth, said its director of overseas networks Keith Beecham.

"About 179,000 Chinese travelled to Britain last year, compared with one million from Australia, our fourth biggest value market," said Beecham, who deemed China an important market despite its "relatively modest travel number".

"We are also looking at emerging opportunities where arrivals are growing 10 to 30 per cent per annum and are generally high-spending visitors."

Some 339,000 Indians visited Britain last year and VisitBritain aims to raise the figure to



500,000 by 2020. It is also targeting 382,000 Chinese arrivals in 2016, up from 179,000 last year.

To tap growth from these focus markets, the NTO and its partners have implemented a series of initiatives that go beyond its global *GREAT Britain – You're Invited* marketing campaign.

In China, VisitBritain has injected an additional £2 million this financial year, a move that follows the recent appointment of a dedicated travel trade representative in Beijing by London & Partners, the capital's tourism promotion agency.

In addition, VisitBritain will soon launch a *China Welcome* initiative to educate the British travel trade on the specific



Beecham: India, China are fast-growing markets

Above, a steam train passes above beach huts in Devon; right, Bodiam Castle is one of the UK's most iconic heritage sites



requirements and preferences of Chinese visitors, said Joss Croft, marketing director, VisitBritain.

Flight capacity between the two countries will also be expanded when British Airways starts its thrice-weekly service between London (Heathrow) and Chengdu via Shanghai on September 22.

Furthermore, the recent £2 million, two-year *Britain, A Tradition of Luxury* joint marketing campaign launched by VisitBritain and Emirates to target affluent international travellers between 35-55 years old is set to play a significant role in India, whose outbound segment is generally younger and more adventurous than China.

Promoting destinations outside of London, which are visited by 53 per cent of all arrivals to Britain, is another key strategy of VisitBritain to garner more international footfalls.

While VisitBritain will not launch major promotions in South-east Asia due to budget constraints, it has identified key "nurture" markets such as Indonesia (see *TTG Asia e-Daily*, May 15, 2013).

As well, the BritAgent programme will continue to play an essential role in educating travel experts, said Croft. Over 3,170 of 5,150 agents are based in APMEA, with China and India accounting for about 1,900.



The waterways of Venice continue to keep Asian visitors spellbound

Italy charms Asian shoppers

By Shekhar Niyogi

The third most visited country in Europe with 17.3 per cent of the continent's total arrivals after Spain (23.2 per cent) and France (26 per cent), Italy has shifted its focus to the fast-growing BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) nations as well as Japan.

According to Confcommercio data, Italy's inbound tourism revenue peaked at 36 billion euros (US\$48 billion) and 47.4 million inbound tourist arrivals in 2012. The most visited regions by international tourists are Venice, Tuscany, Rome and Emilia-

Romagna.

"Indian tourists to Italy have grown 94 per cent in the last five years" said Marco Bruschini, director-general of Italian State Tourist Board (ENIT). "Some 467,000 Indians travelled to Italy in 2012, up from 191,000 in 2007."

Having just reopened its Mumbai office in May 2013 after a year-long absence, ENIT will establish the Italia Academy for the Indian travel trade in 3Q2013 and will bank on Italy's popularity as a setting for Indian films.

"Asia is emerging quickly as a

prime source market...The Italian travel trade is gearing for the market shift from traditional sources like the US and Germany and reorienting itself to India and China," said Beatrice Stefanelli, incoming & events consultant of Bologna-based Viaggi Salvadori, which has designed shopping and gastronomy tours to capture a larger slice of the Asian inbound market.

As Chinese, Japanese and Russian tourists form a large segment of its clientele, Castel Guelfo The Style Outlets has rolled out Asian-centric initiatives, said

marketing specialist Margherita Macchia. "We are targeting India and China, as brands that are currently being advertised and retailed in these countries add outlets in our malls. Personal shoppers trained in Asian tastes and preferences are employed to help them shop (at our outlets)."

The perception of Italy as a luxury shopping destination will lure more visitors from China, travel experts opined. Chinese arrivals to Italy are expected to grow by more than 15 per cent each year from 2012-2016, according to the *World Travel Mar-*

ket Global Trends Report 2012.

Wang Chenchen, European operations executive of Beijing-based U-tour, remarked: "Italy will be big in the next five years for Chinese outbound. We have seen more than 30 per cent growth year-on-year."

However, direct flight connections between Italy and China remain limited, with most links currently served by Air China and China Eastern Airlines.

Samuel Wong, managing director of Hong Kong-based Jetway Express, said: "More direct flights (from China) to Rome and Milan will improve numbers by at least 20 per cent. However, since China is a large country, flights will have to originate from several source cities other than Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou to realise the true potential from this market."

ENIT's efforts to woo Japanese tourists with more roadshows and trade fam trips have paid off, as Japan is Italy's second largest non-EU visitor source market. Said Izumi Sasamori, manager of Tokyo-based Athteion: "The exposure to Italian tourism products has helped us to promote Italy well and the number of tourists to Italy is growing at least 15 per cent annually. Gastronomy is a binder as we pride ourselves on our cuisine too."



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Visitors will get a chance to explore first-hand the nation's major historic and economic hubs, with Washington D.C just a day-trip away from New York City and the towering skyscrapers of Wall Street right there in New York City's financial district. Tour the United Nations headquarters also located in New York City, and you'll feel like you're standing at the crossroads of the world.

Science, Arts, and Culture

Further down the Eastern Seaboard, witness the very frontiers of science at the Kennedy Space Center, home to the nation's space program and NASA at Florida's Cape Canaveral. If you're more interested in moving back into the history of science, visit Thomas Edison's home in Fort Myers.

For visitors looking to immerse themselves in the arts and culture, there are plenty of chances to catch world-renown orchestras throughout the year, and to immerse yourself in countless museums and art galleries.

On the other hand, you could watch the concert of that really new indie band, or simply wander the downtown areas of every city and be rewarded with very local, very authentic street music, or valuable nuggets of public art. Trace the beginnings of the different art, music, and literary movements, and walk the very same streets where legends like Ella Fitzgerald, Jack Kerouac, and Thomas Edison used to walk.

A kaleidoscopic blend of cultures await America's visitors (New York was after all the original 'melting pot'). From funk and jazz created by the African American community to delicious greek gyros sold in New York's street stalls, to Cuban coffee in Little Havana and the magic of Miami nightlife spiced with

American Latin heritage, visitors can always enjoy a different and unique cultural experience.

Natural Beauty

Pick your way cautiously through mangrove swamps alongside wading birds, and keep a look out for the region's iconic creature - the gator. If you're stuck in a buzzing metropolis and need a break, search out that breezy, secluded sanctuary that's certain to be just a short drive away. Or grab a beach towel and flip flops and head straight to the perfect sugar-white beaches lining the eastern shore. Visitors will fall in love with the many national parks dotting the East, and their plethora of ecosystems, flora, and fauna.

And how about some plain fun - make a trip to the theme parks' extreme rides and take in the on-the-edge, adrenaline-pumping thrills, or chill out at a beachside bar with your loved ones. You could even slip into the life of the luxurious with the many luxe options around you, including top-notch accommodation, rejuvenating spas, and yacht rides.

Some Key Facts

Historic landmarks, nature and luxury!

- New York has 722 miles of subway tracks, and over 70,000 miles of rivers and streams
- When Pulitzer raised funds to build the Statue of Liberty in 1884, \$102,000 was raised from 120,000 donors. More astonishingly, 80 percent of the total had been received in sums of less than a dollar.
- Of all amusement park destinations in the US, Orlando attracts the most visitors.
- The Benwood, sunk in the French Reef of the Florida Keys, is one of the most dived shipwrecks in the world.
- Benjamin Green, a Miami pharmacist, invented the first suntan cream in 1944.
- Key West has the highest average temperature in the United States
- 3D films were first presented to a paying audience in Manhattan's Astor Theatre in 1915.
- Key Largo is known as the Dive Capital of the World.
- Orange juice is Florida's state beverage.
- The Florida Museum of Hispanic and Latin American Art in Coral Gables, is the nation's only museum that is dedicated to the preservation, diffusion, and promotion of Hispanic and Latin American Art.



New York, New York!

From the Harlem Renaissance to the best Broadway hits, from world class ballet to hip hop, from world-changing initiatives to shopping havens. This city is bursting with so much color and texture, an infinity of treasures hidden in its nooks and crannies. 'Been there, done that'? It's just not possible for travelers to declare that even after a visit to the city that never sleeps.

Manhattan, with its bustling streets and sophisticated community, is probably what most visitors would imagine to be the quintessential New York - its army of skyscrapers form New York's **world-famous skyline by day and by night**. Many of the key attractions are located here, and visitors are sure to recognise the NYC tourism buzzwords - Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, Times Square, Central Park.

More Than Manhattan

The Bronx is situated on the mainland, and despite being one of the most densely populated counties in the US, has one-quarter of its land area given over to parks and open spaces, making it a great place to take in the outdoors. Besides being the home to the **New York Yankees**, The Bronx is also the birthplace of **hip hop**.

Brooklyn holds a collection of **ethnic enclaves** formed by the immigrants streaming into the city, from the Italian Americans, Orthodox Jews, Arab Americans and Greek Americans to the Chinese Americans and West Indian community. Besides these colorful neighbourhoods, Brooklyn is famous for its standing in the art and cultural field with the **Brooklyn Academy of Music**, **Brooklyn Philharmonic** and **Brooklyn Museum**. Its long beachfront shoreline includes **Coney Island**.

Queens has been named most ethnically diverse urban area in the world, and, like Brooklyn, consists of distinct ethnic enclaves. Its neighbourhoods range from packed apartment buildings to suburban housing. The last borough, **Staten Island** is the quietest, and is home to many budding artists. Its protected land, the **Staten Island Greenbelt**, is full of walking trails and is one of the last undisturbed forests in the city.

Hospitality Options

Hotel Metro - New York City

Chic and affordable, this hotel captures the Big Apple's essence by combining sleek modern decor and boutique charm.

Its fantastic location means must-see sights like Times Square, the Empire State Building, and Macy's are within half a mile.

Thompson LES

The hotel's unusually large rooms are designed with slate, brick, tropical woods and photographs by artist Lee Friedlander.

Stay

Drama is Stay's modus operandi with its 18,000 gallon aquarium, Murano glass chandeliers, and luxe amenities like feather-filled duvets and L'occitane products.

Ace Hotel

This chic, inexpensive hotel chain's design goes industrial vintage with a musical twist - including old school turntables with LPs and guitars in each room.

The Standard

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Number 4

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Booth
Number 3

Key cities, key experiences

Miami

- Thrilling nightlife at the chic **South Beach (SoBe)** at the Art Deco District
- Wynwood Arts District's** galleries and studios, featuring exciting new work by up-and-coming artists
- A taste of Cuba at **Little Havana**, with its guayabera-wearing retirees, black bean cuisine, and coffee
- A sanctuary from the bustling city centre- **Fairchild Tropical Botanic Gardens**

Orlando

- Land of **theme parks**: Walt Disney World, Universal Studios Orlando, SeaWorld Orlando, Discovery Cove, and more
- Cirque du Soleil's La Nouba** - gravity-defying acrobatics, mesmerizing music, and brilliant choreography
- Literary history** downtown: Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts, and Jack Kerouac's old cottage

St. Augustine

- Narrow streets, Spanish colonial buildings and elite 19th century architecture in the **'Nation's Oldest City'**
- Historical landmarks** like the Hotel Ponce de Leon, Castillo de San Marcos, and the Oldest Wooden Schoolhouse
- Exclusive small-group tours at **St Augustine Wild Reserve**
- History and views from the **St. Augustine Lighthouse & Museum**

Destin


- Exceptionally beautiful **beaches**, with soft, sugar-white sand
- The **'world's luckiest fishing village'** - world-class fishing and the Destin History & Fishing Museum
- Dolphin watching via wave runner** in the Gulf of Mexico and Choctawhatchee Bay
- Family fun and bungee at the **Track Family Recreation Center**

St. Petersburg

- Fort de Soto Park**, across five islands - rated among the top ten beaches in the US
- Museum of the Fine Arts**, featuring exhibits of European, American, pre-Columbian and Far Eastern works
- Antique shopping and fresh seafood on the **Pier** on the waterfront
- Professional baseball team, the **Tampa Bay Rays** at Tropicana Field

Fort Lauderdale

- Over **300 miles of inland waterways and waterfront homes** at the 'Venice of America'
- The well-landscaped **Port Everglades**, where cruises depart for the Caribbean
- Shopping and dining on the picturesque **Las Olas Boulevard**
- Stranahan House**, a preserved 1900's home furnished with antiques of the era



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Booth Number **2**

The Luxe Life

American brands are internationally renown for quality and excellence - it's no wonder that shopping is an attraction on its own in the US! Learn more about two of its top luxury brands, Sterling Jewelers and the Meritage Collection.

Meritage Collection

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The Meritage Resort and Spa of Napa Valley is located against an idyllic backdrop of hillsides of vineyards. The hotel is modelled after old-world Tuscany, and features the Estate Cave, which holds the Trinitas Cellars tasting room, and Spa Terra, for curative amenities.



Luxury hotels, spas, and diamonds!

Bacara Resort and Spa, nestled on the Santa Barbara coast, is the perfect place to relax by the sea. Award-winning restaurants and a state-of-the-art spa and wellness centre will delight its guests.

Balboa Bay Resort in Newport Beach give guests the laid-back South California lifestyle experience. Stunning bay views and luxe amenities ensure that its guests leave satisfied

Estancia La Jolla Hotel & Spa creates an incredible experience on its rancho-style grounds. Guests can viist villages La Jolla and Del Mar, or tee off at the Torrey Pines Golf Course.

The Meritage Collection
www.meritagecollection.com
Maria Elena Kaldani
Mekaldani@uniquehotelsolutions.com

Booth Number **7**

Sterling Jewelers

Founded in 1910 by Henry Shaw, Sterling Jewelers is the United States' largest specialty fine jewelry company. Sterling prides itself on wide selections, reasonable pricing, and the strength of its experts' advice.

It retails premium items like the beautifully cut **Leo Diamond®**, **Shades of Wonder**, rare, natural **color diamonds**, and the lustruous **Sea Magic Cultured Pearls® by Mikimoto**.

Another option perfect for engagement and wedding rings is the **Design-A-Ring** option Sterling's brands offer. Customers will be spoilt for choice with limitless combinations of over 5,000 certified diamonds and hundreds of designs and settings.

Besides jewelry, Sterling Jewelers also deals in watches and engraving. Its twelve brands include **Kay Jewelers**, **Jared The Galleria of Jewelry**, and **Goodman Jewelers**.

Sterling Jewelers Inc.
www.sterlingjewelers.com
Barbara Hornyak
bhornyak@jewels.com

Booth Number **8**

In A State Of Sunshine

Named 'La Florida' – 'Flowery Land' – half a millenium ago by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León, Florida's warm, stable climate and beaches have kept it high up on the list of American tourist destinations.

Its balmy climate can be attributed to the way almost the entire state is surrounded by water – most of Florida lies on a peninsula between the **Gulf of Mexico**, the **Atlantic** and the **Straits of Florida**, while extensive networks of **waterways** pattern its inlands.

With all that water around, visitors should definitely allot part of their itinerary to spend some time with it. The Sunshine State's **amazing beaches** run along 1,350 miles of coastline and aquamarine waters, and offer far more than the run-of-the-mill sunbathing and swimming. Visitors could **parasail over the Ten Thousand Islands** to take in the full extent of its beauty, or get acquainted with kaleidoscopic fish while **snorkelling in the Florida Keys' protected waters**.

The Sunshine State's amazing beaches run along 1,350 miles of coastline and aquamarine waters, and offer far more than the run-of-the-mill sunbathing and swimming

Visitors who want a break from the norm can visit **Sannibel Island's** seashell-covered beach to do the 'Sannibel Stoop' picking the shells up. Heading inland is always an option, and visitors can opt to explore **Ocala's Silver Springs** on a glass-bottom boat, go **tubing down the Rainbow Springs**, or take a gondola through the **intercoastal waterway**.

Beaches, fine arts, and theme parks!



The adventurous should head straight for the **Everglades**. An airboat ride or guided walk through its mangroves will treat visitors to an incredible diversity of plants and wildlife. **Everglades National Park** is, after all, the first national park specifically set up to protect its diverse ecosystem of flora and fauna.

After washing off the mangrove mud, visitors can drop by **Everglades City** to sample sweet, juicy seasonal

stone crab meat. Florida's fresh seafood offers many experiences - visitors can go on **scaloping expeditions at coastal city Steinhatchee** or learn about **Apalachicola's oysters** before chowing down on the delicacies.

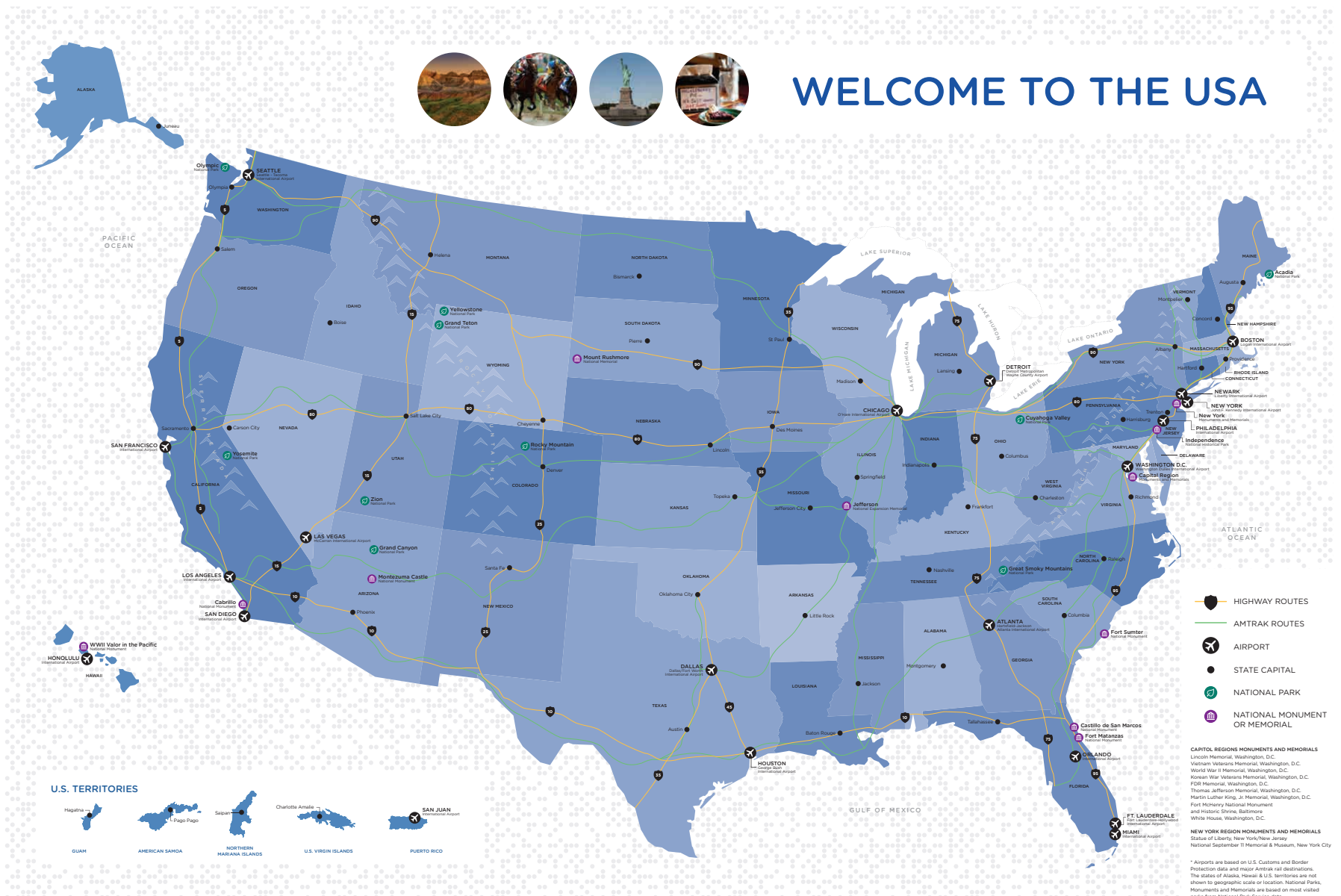
Travelers who have a passion for shopping will be delighted with Florida's retail havens, including **Winter Park's Park Avenue**, a quaint street featuring both local boutiques and trendy nightlife venues like Luma or Wine Room, the **St. Johns Town Centre at Jacksonville**, or the **Orlando Premium Outlets**.

To time-travel through Florida's five hundred years of history, the '**Ancient City**' **St. Augustine** is a must. For a different experience, **Tallahassee's Mission San Luis and Museum** is great for a glimpse of 17th century Spanish mission and Native American tribes.

Florida has plenty for a lover of the arts, who can choose between a night of enthralling music performed by the **Grammy-nominated Naples Philharmonic Orchestra**, or go surreal at the **Salvador Dali Museum** in St. Petersburg. Literary fans can pay homage to **Ernest Hemingway's** home in Key West.

Finally, who would be able to resist Orlando's massive collection of **fun-filled, family-friendly theme parks**? Visitors should stay on for a restful night at their attached resorts.

The beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel
Photo credit to VISIT FLORIDA



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.

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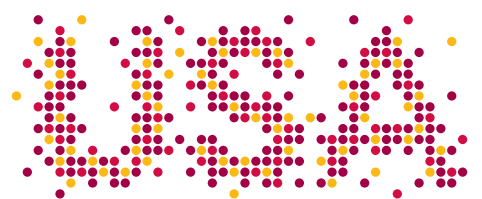
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It's showtime

By Patrick Tan



Dorsett Hospitality International Malaysia's David Teoh, Dorsett Grand Labuan Malaysia's Annie Dures, Dorsett Hospitality International Hong Kong's Melpo Wong, Dorsett Hospitality International Malaysia's Christina Toh, Dorsett Hospitality International Hong Kong's Vivian Lo, Dorsett Singapore's Frankie Lam, and Silka Hotels Malaysia's Henry Loo and Shahrir Naelis Amir



Millennium & Copthorne International Singapore's Franz Zeller, Yasemin Tecmen Stubbe and Winston L Reinboth



Visit Finland's Anne Lind, with Santa, naturally



Swiss Garden Malaysia's Sally Gong and May Chan, TripAdvisor Singapore's Leya Lee, AsiaRooms Singapore's Trina See and Joy Ng, and Swiss Garden Malaysia's Kem Siew



ZDirect US' Hayes Thomas, Caren De'ath and Kim Thomas, and ZDirect Singapore's Martin Chua



Le Meridien Cambodia's Dennis Kam, The Westin Siray Bay Thailand's Audra Arul, Sheraton Krabi Thailand's Sanjana Bhattachan and The Great Wall Sheraton Hotel China's Henry Banson



Lanson Place's Helen H Y Cheung (Hong Kong), Rachel Lin (Hong Kong), Jessy Chan (Malaysia) and Jimmy Yu (China)



Melia Hanoi Vietnam's Nguyen Chau Dzung and Cao Viet Tuan, Melia Kuala Lumpur Malaysia's Josephine Ooi, and Melia Hotels International's Sharon Lee (Indonesia), Zita Ng (China) and Chris Yan (China)



Rembrant Hotel & Towers Thailand's Kamolunch Bhiromsawad and Eric Hallin, and JHC Worldwide Thailand's Fukiko Kawanami



Carlton Singapore's Jenny Tan, Tripzanee East China Singapore's Calvin Tay and Carlton Singapore's Cindy Goo



Star Holiday Mart Singapore's Dennis Law and Nagaworld Cambodia's Thong Sokhaleap

Many likes and fans

By Patrick Tan



Sentosa Leisure Management Singapore's Ted Liu, Steven Chung, Anna Ico, Rachael Lee and Fabian Lim



The Seminyak Beach Resort & Spa Indonesia's Herdy D Sayogha and The Pavilion Bali's Il Soon Kang



Design Hotels Singapore's Joanne Seah, Jaime Kuek, Aik Wee Ong, Carsten Lima, Brandon Chan and Lim Huizhen



Miramar International Hotel Management Corp SA Hong Kong's Janet Yu, Miramar Group Hong Kong's Frank Foster, The Mira Hong Kong's Maggie Huh and Mira Moon Hotel Hong Kong's Lai Oi Man Jaly



PATA's Martin Craigs (centre) can't get enough of TTTG publications. With Movenpick Hotels & Resorts' Marion Schumacher (left) and TTTG Asia Media's Raini Hamdi



Singapore Tourism Board's Alvin Ng Kim Tian and Resheemah M A, Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau's Andrew Phua and Singapore Tourism Board's Ong Fang Xun and Nur Shariza bte Bahrawi



Centara Hotels & Resorts Thailand's Alisa Saovapong and Paranyoo Madtakid



Sari Ater Hotel & Resort Indonesia's Hendra Wibawa, Savoy Homann Indonesia's Aggy, and West Java Tourism Promotion Board Indonesia's Maktal Hadiyat and Djoni Iskandar



Luxury Escapes Australia's Paul Gorman and Mozaic Hotels & Resorts Singapore's Fiona Neo and Henry Ng



LotteJTB Korea's Joonbaek Song, Lassen Tours US' Eri Masunaga, Tumlare Universal Netlink Malaysia's Julia Lai, Star Holiday Mart Singapore's Dominic Ong, JTB Hong Kong's Rachel Chum, JTB Global Marketing & Travel Japan's Kenichi Takano



Consortium Tours of North America US' Wolf Mertel, NYC US' Makiko Matsuda Healy, Skyliner US' Peter Kim, Team America US' Viviana Natta and Brandstory Singapore's Selena Oh



Seoul Tourism Organization Korea's Jin-Hyeok Park



Jin Jiang International Hotel China's Fabian Seet, Eva Zhang, Cinn Tan, Coco Gong and Joseph Xia

Erase visa pains

India's planned VOA extension will remove barrier, up twinning

By S Puvaneswary

INDIA will remove a major deterrent if its plans to extend visa-on-arrival (VOA) to 40 countries goes through, say buyers interviewed at ITB Asia.

Andrzej Goldyka, managing director of TUI Poland, described the current hassle in getting an Indian visa, which he said is a month-long wait and quite beyond the control of the applicant: "By right, it should take two weeks to get a visa to India, but one or two days before the date of collection, clients would get a call from the Indian embassy giving a new collection date, often two weeks later, with no reasons given for the delay."

"Our clients had to cancel their travel plans as they could not get a visa on time."

Jerzy Jaworski, general director of Tourism Office Jaworski, another buyer from Poland, said with constant delays in visa processing, the company could not promise clients that they could get a visa in less than a month.

VOA will make travel hassle-free and offer travellers peace of mind, he said, adding North India appeals to Polish group travellers and the FIT segment who tend to spend between seven and

21 nights there.

Jasmin Schenk, product manager incentives of Poppe & Co Germany, said VOA will incentivise the company to come up with India programmes for German groups and do more twin packages covering India and a

"...one or two days before the date of collection, clients would get a call from the Indian embassy giving a new collection date..."

Andrzej Goldyka

Managing director, TUI Poland

neighbouring destination.

She said: "India is culturally rich and provides a different experience for our travellers."

"For repeat visitors, we will introduce twin destinations, such as India with Nepal, or South India with Sri Lanka."

India's inbound agents anticipate an increase in arrivals if the plan goes into operation. Amit Prasad, chief operating officer at

Go India Journeys, said neighbouring countries such as Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka would benefit as, with a better visa assurance, tour operators could be more confident of doing multi-destinations.

Concurred Arul Gupta, chief operating officer at Yeti Group of Companies in Kathmandu, Nepal: "For Europeans, Nepal is primarily sold as an add-on destination to India."

Similarly Sampath Senevirathne, front office manager at Calamander Unawatuna Beach in Galle, Sri Lanka, said Sri Lanka's close proximity to South India makes extensions appealing, and both destinations offer different experiences.

As reported by *TTG Asia e-Daily*, October 11, India's Planning Commission has proposed India offers VOA at four more Indian airports, on top of the existing eight, and increase the number of countries allowed VOA to 40. The commission hopes this will include the US, the UK, Canada, Brazil, Australia, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Spain, on top of the 11 countries it now allows.

Mövenpick competes with 'collection' strategy

By Hannah Koh

SWISS company Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts' strategy for Asia is to create a special collection of hotels, rather than a large number of properties which president and CEO Jean Gabriel Pérès said could be done if it wants to.

The "collection" or "cluster" focus has seen the brand moving into new areas such as Kuala Terengganu in Malaysia (opening in 2017), Chifeng in Inner Mongolia (2015) and Quy Nhon in Vietnam (2017), on top of the usual crop of Asian destinations such as Makati (2016/2017), Bali (2015), Shanghai and Guangdong (2017), Hainan (2015), Chiang Mai (late 2014), Pattaya (2014/2015), Samui and Hua Hin (2017) and Kuala Lumpur (2016).

Pérès said: "The opening of Mövenpick Hotel Enshi (recently) showed that it is not necessary to go into top cities with saturated markets. Go into cities with three million inhabitants and make a difference."

Andreas Mattmüller, COO Middle East and Asia, added: "As a private company, we are not beholden to shareholders, so we want to grow with the right partners, with the right vision, at the right pace."

The company, which first entered Asia in 2006, has since grown its portfolio to eight hotels in Singapore, Cebu, Hanoi and most recently, China.

It is eyeing 20-25 hotels operating in Asia by 2017 and to-date 18 are already under development.

Singapore-based Fascinating Holidays' managing director, David Teo, said the new Mövenpick Malaysia hotels will attract more high-end tourists from Singapore, adding it is a chance to "expose our customers to a new destination", such as Chendering beach in Terengganu.

Cindy Loo, business development manager of Singapore-based Jetabout Holidays, said most of her FIT clients "(want to go to) places where the hotel is a destination in itself".

China is the company's fastest-growing source market. South Korea, Thailand and India are doing well, while the Philippines and Indonesia are picking up as the emerging middle class in these countries enter the travel scene, said Markus Mueller, vice president sales and marketing Asia.

Mövenpick has correspondingly rolled out amenities and facilities at its Asian hotels to cater to regional travellers.

Asian travel agents powwow

By Patrick Tan



MasterCard Worldwide Asia-Pacific's Julieanne Loh, National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS)'s Patricia Auyeong and Ram K Samtani, Online Travel Agencies' Alan Gertner, Abacus International's Brett Henry, Country Holidays Travel's Chang Theng Hwee and Fly Entertainment Singapore's Jacqueline Chow



Google Asia-Pacific Singapore's Bambos Kaisharis and Jacob Zachariah, and Singapore Tourism Board's Ong Ling Lee



CTC Singapore's Alicia Seah, Japan National Tourism Organization Singapore's Susan Maria Ong, and Kuoni Singapore's Julie Lim



Pacific Leisure Marketing Australia's Grace Tong, NATAS Singapore's Jeffrey Yeo, Tourism Western Australia's Ee-Lian Lee and Tourism Tasmania's Jacqueline Lee



MasterCard Worldwide Singapore's Christabel Tan, Kara-Mae Lim and Quek Puay Cheng



Tradewinds Singapore's Chua Kian Hwa and Karen Loh, and Abacus Singapore's Ho Hoong Mau



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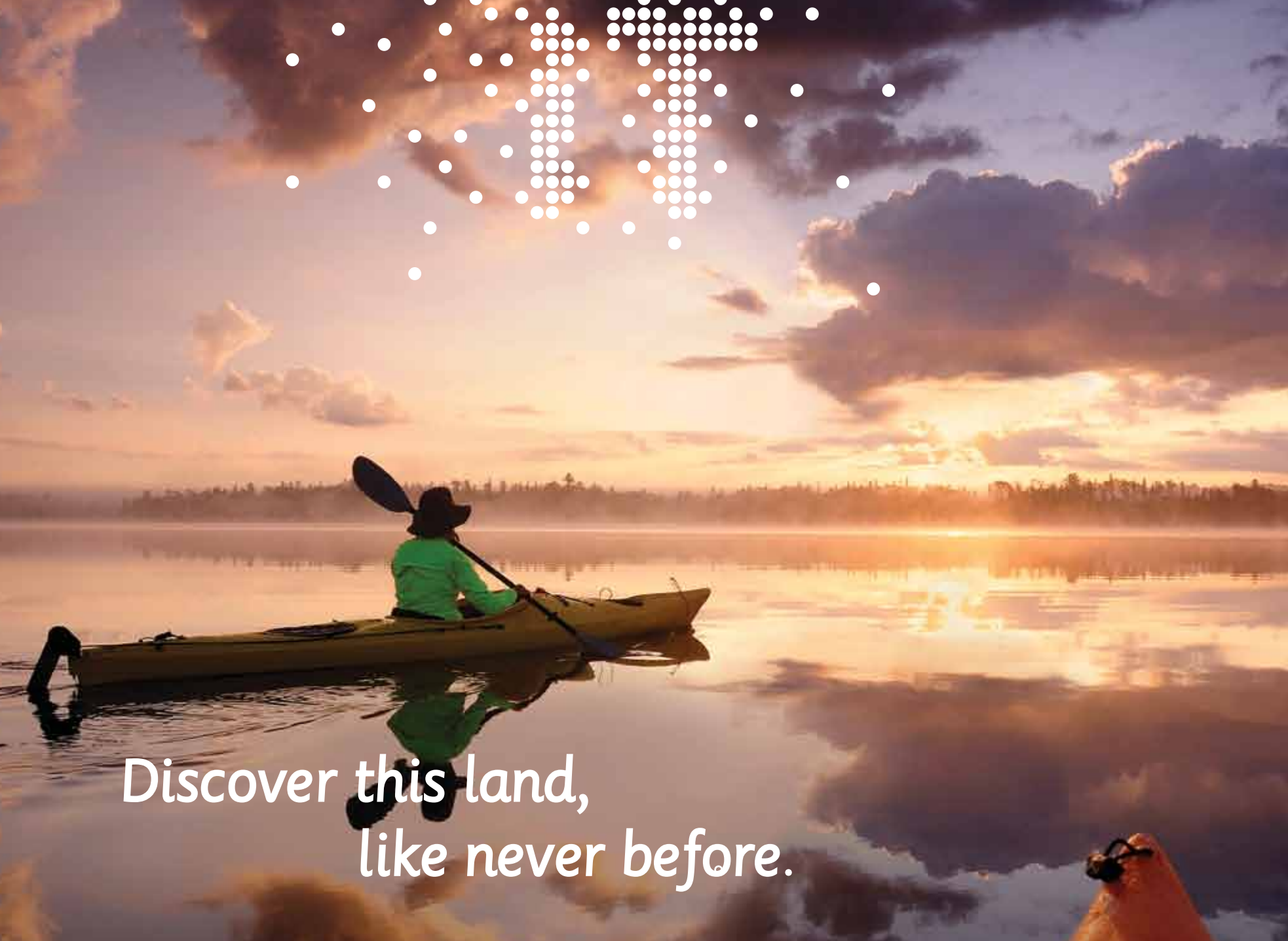
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