



V I S I T T H E  
P H I L I P P I N E S

*again*

2016



# MAJOR EVENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

## JANUARY



**ASEAN TOURISM FORUM 2016**  
SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
JANUARY 18-25, 2016

### COLOR MANILA RUN

SM MALL OF ASIA GROUNDS,  
PASAY CITY  
JANUARY 3, 2016

### LIFE DANCE 2016

SAN PEDRO CALUNGSOD SHRINE AREA  
SRP, CEBU CITY  
JANUARY 15, 2016

### SINULOG 2016

CEBU CITY  
JANUARY 18, 2016

### ONE OK ROCK LIVE IN MANILA

MALL OF ASIA ARENA, PASAY CITY  
JANUARY 19, 2016

### DINAGYANG FESTIVAL

ILOILO CITY  
JANUARY 22-24, 2016

### EXO LIVE IN MANILA

MALL OF ASIA ARENA, PASAY CITY  
JANUARY 23-24, 2016

### INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

CEBU CITY  
JANUARY 24-31, 2016

## FEBRUARY



**23RD TRAVEL TOUR EXPO**  
SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
FEBRUARY 5-7, 2016

### PANAGBENGA FESTIVAL 2016

BAGUIO CITY  
FEBRUARY 1, 2016

### WINTER ESCAPE 3 - IT'S MORE FUN IN THE PHILIPPINES

ALBAY-CAMARINES SUR-MANILA-  
PUERTO PRINCESA-SORSOGON  
FEBRUARY 3-12, 2016

### XTERRA ALBAY OFF-ROAD TRIATHLON SERIES

LEGAZPI CITY, ALBAY  
FEBRUARY 5-7, 2016

### 11TH IRONMAN MOTORCYCLE CHALLENGE AND IRONMAN AUTOMOBILE CHALLENGE

NORTH PHILIPPINES  
FEBRUARY 5-7, 2016

### 20TH PHILIPPINE INTERNATIONAL HOT AIR BALLOON FIESTA

CLARK FREEPORT ZONE, PAMPANGA  
FEBRUARY 11-14, 2016

### 7TH PHILIPPINE INTERNATIONAL PYROMUSICAL COMPETITION 2016

SM MALL OF ASIA COMPLEX, PASAY CITY  
FEBRUARY 13 - MARCH 19, 2016 (EVERY SATURDAY)

### MADONNA REBEL HEART TOUR MANILA

MALL OF ASIA ARENA, PASAY CITY  
FEBRUARY 24-25, 2016

## MARCH



**MALASIMBO MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL**  
PUERTO GALERA,  
ORIENTAL MINDORO  
MARCH 4-6, 2016

### SHELL ECO-MARATHON ASIA 2016

MANILA  
MARCH 3-6, 2016

### CENTURY TUNA IRONMAN 70.3 PHILIPPINES

SBMA, ZAMBALES  
MARCH 4-6, 2016

### ROUTES ASIA

SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
MARCH 6-9, 2016

### PHILIPPINES INTERNATIONAL FURNITURE SHOW

SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
MARCH 11-13, 2016

### BEAST FIRST FAN MEETING IN MANILA

SMART ARANETA COLISEUM,  
QUEZON CITY  
MARCH 19, 2016

### MORIONES FESTIVAL

MARINDUQUE  
MARCH 29, 2016

## APRIL



**MADRID FUSIÓN MANILA**  
SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
APRIL 7-9, 2016

### BANGUS FESTIVAL

DAGUPAN CITY, PANGASINAN  
APRIL 1, 2016

### FLAVOURS OF THE PHILIPPINES

NATIONWIDE  
APRIL 3-30, 2016

### MAYON 360 ALBAY ULTRAMARATHON 2016

LEGAZPI CITY, ALBAY  
APRIL 9, 2016

### PARADISE INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

ASEANA CITY, PARAÑAQUE  
APRIL 9, 2016

### WORLD STREET FOOD JAMBOREE

BONIFACIO GLOBAL CITY, TAGUIG  
APRIL 20-24, 2016

### A SALUTE TO VALOR: PALAWAN LIBERATION

PUERTO PRINCESA, PALAWAN  
APRIL 21-23, 2016

### MT. APO BOULDER CHALLENGE 2016

STA. CRUZ, DAVAO DEL SUR  
APRIL 24, 2016

## MAY



**MTV MUSIC EVOLUTION MANILA**  
SM MALL OF ASIA  
CONCERT GROUNDS,  
PASAY CITY  
MAY 28, 2016

### OF MONSTERS AND MEN LIVE IN MANILA

WORLD TRADE CENTER METRO MANILA,  
PASAY CITY  
MAY 12, 2016

### PULILAN CARABAO FESTIVAL 2016

PULILAN, BULACAN  
MAY 14, 2016

### HANGAWAY: THE ANTIQUE HALF-MARATHON CHALLENGE 2016

ANTIQUE  
MAY 15, 2016

### PAHIYAS FESTIVAL

LUCBAN, QUEZON  
MAY 15, 2016

### 2016 CLOSE UP FOREVER SUMMER

SM MALL OF ASIA CONCERT GROUNDS,  
PASAY CITY  
MAY 21, 2016

### JASON DERULO LIVE IN MANILA 2016

MALL OF ASIA ARENA, PASAY CITY  
MAY 27, 2016

### NATURES TRAIL DISCOVERY RUN IV 2016

TANAY, RIZAL  
MAY 29, 2016

## JUNE



**PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENCE DAY**  
NATIONWIDE  
JUNE 12, 2016

### SARANGANI BAY FESTIVAL 2016

GLAN, SARANGANI  
JUNE 3-4, 2016

### SIAL ASEAN

WORLD TRADE CENTER METRO MANILA,  
PASAY CITY  
JUNE 15-17, 2016

### PHILIPPINES INTERNATIONAL BEAUTY SHOW

SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
JUNE 21 - JULY 1, 2016

### MUDPACK FESTIVAL 2016

MURCIA, NEGROS ORIENTAL  
JUNE 23, 2016

### THE PHILIPPINE WEDDING SUMMIT

SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
JUNE 25, 2016

### CEBU INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL EXPO (CITE)

WATERFRONT CEBU CITY HOTEL  
AND CASINO, CEBU CITY  
JUNE 30 - JULY 2, 2016

Find any excuse  
to come back.



## JULY



**SANDUGO FESTIVAL**  
TAGBILARAN CITY,  
BOHOL  
JULY 13, 2016

### T'NALAK FESTIVAL

KORONADAL CITY,  
SOUTH COTABATO  
JULY 10-18, 2016

### INTERNATIONAL AUTO PARTS ACCESSORIES AND SERVICE AND REPAIR EQUIPMENT EXHIBITION

SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
JULY 15-17, 2016

### KINABAYO FESTIVAL

DAPITAN CITY,  
ZAMBOANGA DEL NORTE  
JULY 16, 2016

### 4TH ANNUAL POWER & ELECTRICITY PHILIPPINES WEEK 2016

THE PENINSULA MANILA,  
MAKATI CITY  
JULY 19-22, 2016

### FRANCHISE ASIA PHILIPPINES

SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
JULY 20-24, 2016

## AUGUST



**70.3 IRONMAN  
ASIA-PACIFIC  
CHAMPIONSHIP**  
MACTAN ISLAND,  
CEBU  
AUGUST 7, 2016

### IBALONG FESTIVAL

LEGAZPI CITY, ALBAY  
AUGUST 3, 2016

### WORLD FOOD EXPO

WORLD TRADE CENTER METRO MANILA,  
PASAY CITY  
AUGUST 3-6, 2016

### CINEMALAYA 2016

MANILA  
AUGUST 6, 2016

### MT. BATOLUSONG MOUNTAIN RUN

TANAY, RIZAL  
AUGUST 7, 2016

### SYSTEMS INTEGRATION PHILIPPINES

SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
AUGUST 11-13, 2016

### JAY TROMP I LIKE THAT! ASIA TOUR

EXKLUSIV CLUB, ADRIATICO, MANILA  
AUGUST 14, 2016

### KADAYAWAN FESTIVAL

DAVAO CITY  
AUGUST 17, 2016

## SEPTEMBER



**27TH  
PHILIPPINE TRAVEL MART**  
SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
SEPTEMBER 2-4, 2016

### FOOD & DRINKS ASIA

WORLD TRADE CENTER METRO MANILA,  
PASAY CITY  
SEPTEMBER 1-4, 2016

### TUNA FESTIVAL

GENERAL SANTOS CITY  
SEPTEMBER 5, 2016

### DAVAO INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL EXPO

SMX CONVENTION CENTER, DAVAO CITY  
SEPTEMBER 9-11, 2016

### DAVAO INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL EXPO

SMX CONVENTION CENTER, DAVAO CITY  
SEPTEMBER 9-11, 2016

### DIVE & RESORT TRAVEL PHILIPPINES EXPO

SM MEGATRADE HALL, MANDALUYONG CITY  
SEPTEMBER 9-11, 2016

### GREEN PHILIPPINES 2016

SMX CONVENTION CENTER, PASAY CITY  
SEPTEMBER 22-24, 2016

### MANILA INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL EXPO

SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
SEPTEMBER 22-24, 2016

## OCTOBER



**TRAVEL BLOG  
EXCHANGE (TBEX)  
ASIA 2016**  
MANILA  
OCTOBER 13-16, 2016

### RUN UNITED PHILIPPINE MARATHON

MANILA  
OCTOBER 2, 2016

### CALACA BATANGAS FESTIVAL 2016

CALACA, BATANGAS  
OCTOBER 4, 2016

### MASSKARA FESTIVAL

BACOLOD CITY, NEGROS OCCIDENTAL  
OCTOBER 14, 2016

### INTERFERRY CONFERENCE

HOTEL SOFITEL PHILIPPINE PLAZA,  
PASAY CITY  
OCTOBER 15-19, 2016

### LANZONES FESTIVAL

CAMIGUIN  
OCTOBER 18, 2016

### ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPEN UNIVERSITIES

CROWNE PLAZA GALLERIA,  
QUEZON CITY  
OCTOBER 26-29, 2016

## NOVEMBER



**PHILCONSTRUCT**  
SMX CONVENTION CENTER  
AND WORLD TRADE CENTER  
METRO MANILA, PASAY CITY  
NOVEMBER 10-13, 2016

### SANDUROT FESTIVAL

DUMAGUETE CITY,  
NEGROS ORIENTAL  
NOVEMBER 2016

### PINTAFLORES FESTIVAL

SAN CARLOS CITY,  
NEGROS OCCIDENTAL  
NOVEMBER 3, 2016

### GETTING MARRIED BRIDAL FAIR

SMX CONVENTION CENTER,  
PASAY CITY  
NOVEMBER 5-6, 2016

### NOEL BAZAAR

WORLD TRADE CENTER METRO MANILA,  
PASAY CITY  
NOVEMBER 18-30, 2016

### HIGANTES FESTIVAL

ANGONO, RIZAL  
NOVEMBER 22, 2016

## DECEMBER



**GIANT LANTERN FESTIVAL**  
SAN FERNANDO CITY,  
PAMPANGA  
DECEMBER 2016

### SINUKWAN FESTIVAL

SAN FERNANDO, PAMPANGA  
DECEMBER 1, 2016

### INTEGRATED SOUTH EAST ASIAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

THE LEGEND HOTEL, PUERTO PRINCESA  
DECEMBER 2-3, 2016

### AEROSPACE SUMMIT

MANILA  
DECEMBER 7-9, 2016

### SIMBANG GABI (DAWN MASS)

CATHOLIC CHURCHES NATIONWIDE  
DECEMBER 16-24, 2016

### INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT ON ELECTRICAL, ELECTRONICS, INSTRUMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION ENGINEERING (ISEEICE)

MANILA HOTEL, MANILA  
DECEMBER 17-18, 2016

### METRO MANILA FILM FESTIVAL

MANILA  
DECEMBER 25, 2016





Every Bite <sup>REVEALS</sup>  
New Riches of Flavor  
Abundant Depths  
<sup>FROM THE</sup> of the Ocean  
<sup>WHILE ON THE SURFACE</sup> We hear Echoes  
Calling <sup>US</sup> Back  
<sup>TO THE</sup> Sweetness <sup>OF THE</sup>  
Distant Shore



Squid balls  
<sup>WILL</sup> never  
be <sup>THE</sup> same





ITB Berlin, Germany  
March 10, 2016



## ITB birthday gift: ITB China

Messe Berlin guarantees 500 leading Chinese buyers at first show in Shanghai in May next year

By Raini Hamdi and Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

WITH every destination in the world courting the huge China outbound market, Messe Berlin marks 50 years of ITB Berlin this year with a new offshoot, ITB China, which will debut next year in Shanghai from May 10-12.

The show will be organised by a new subsidiary of Messe Berlin, MB Exhibitions (Shanghai), and will focus exclusively on Chinese buyers meeting global destinations and service providers, ITB China general manager David Axiotis told the *Daily*.

Its local partner is TravelDaily China, which will also jointly organise an ITB China Convention in parallel with the show.

According to Messe Berlin's division head Martin Buck, the big names of China's travel industry such as Ctrip, Alitrip, Tuniu, Utour and Caissa have committed to sending buyers to ITB China next year.

"We will be able to guarantee our international exhibitors around 500 buyers from leading companies representing the Chinese travel industry," said Buck.

ITB China will be pitting itself against existing travel tradeshows such as the World Travel Fair in Shanghai, China Outbound Travel & Tourism Market (COTTM) in Beijing and China International Travel Mart,

which is a national show rotated between Shanghai and Kunming.

Industry members interviewed said doing business in China was different and it would be interesting to see how successful ITB China would be in the years ahead.

"Although there is no guarantee, I believe ITB China can be successful because it has the expertise, financial wherewithals and reputation. Asians still go for 'Western' brand names and 'ITB' is one such brand.

"For many sellers not just in Asia but worldwide, there is no way of getting through to the Chinese agency community. This gives them the chance to. And

if the sellers are there, the buyers will come," said Ken Chang, vice president, Associated Tours Hong Kong.

But Chang doubted if Hong Kong sellers would join ITB China as many of them already understood the market well.

He expects ITB China to be bigger than ITB Asia in Singapore, now into its ninth year, saying that ASEAN outbound combined alone was the equivalent of just one province in China.

Adam Wu, CEO of Beijing-based World Travel Online and CBN Travel & MICE, said there was still space for more tradeshows in China. "Eight out of 10 Chinese buyers probably don't

know ITB...ITB Berlin doesn't (have many) Chinese buyers," he said, adding if ITB China build the show, the delegates would come.

But some industry members have reservations about tilting the balance towards China outbound. German tour operator Marco Polo Reisen, for instance, was experiencing difficulties in getting good rates and allotments in the Far East because of strong regional markets such as China, said managing director Holger Baldus.

CYTS International Travel, international department II deputy general manager, Zhou Zhanfeng, believed a major travel

tradeshow specialising in the inbound market was needed to improve China's image on the international world tourism stage.

"Inbound tourism to China has been dropping in recent years due to negative coverage of the country on issues like pollution and higher tour prices. An inbound show will help to overcome the negative coverage of China in the Western world.

"Most of the existing shows like COTTM already focus on China outbound tourism, we have no need for that. We've heard of so much news on Chinese tourists shopping and travelling overseas, so why not get international tourists to visit China, spend their money in the country and help the Chinese economy instead?"

Zhou also urged China National Tourism Administration to step up its destination marketing efforts as well as tackling barriers like visa for foreign visitors. "China has vast geography, attractions and human resources, so why aren't we attracting more repeat visitors? Thailand, despite its smaller size, attracts about three to four times more tourists from Germany than China."

He also said China outbound tourism was a "losing business" for outbound companies due to intense competition over prices.



At the signing yesterday, from left, Caissa's Xiaoxing Zhang, Ctrip's John Zhong, Alibaba Group's Sherri Wu, Messe Berlin's Martin Buck, PhoCusWright's Philip Wolf, ChinaTravelNews' Charlie Li, Tunia's Alex Yan and Messe Berlin's Christian Göke

## Malaysia NTO steps in after Lufthansa stepped out

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

TOURISM Malaysia will be increasing destination promotion efforts in Germany following the loss of direct air connectivity between Malaysia and Germany on March 1.

Lufthansa's suspension of its Frankfurt-Kuala Lumpur service, which had been in operation since 2004, translated to a loss of over 100,000 direct seats per year to Malaysia, said Mohamed Amin Yahya, director of Tourism Malaysia Frankfurt.

To ensure that Malaysia is not forgotten, he said the NTO would be developing "tactical campaigns and collaborations"

with other airlines that provide connectivity from the German market to Malaysia.

For example, Tourism Malaysia and Singapore Airlines will be signing a marketing collaboration agreement during ITB Berlin to bring in more German tourists to destinations such as Penang, Langkawi, Sabah and Sarawak, he said.

Mohamed Amin said the destination's brand awareness would also be raised through advertising. "We will place advertisements in the relevant German newspapers, and in

the tourism trade and consumer magazines," he said.

A new taxi and tram advertisement campaign, which involves 100 taxis, is running the entire month of March and features Malaysia's most popular tourism products, such as the Gawai festival. This is complemented by big banner advertisements at the Berlin Hauptbahnhof train station, which runs to end-April.

Apart from fam trips, Mohamed Amin said the NTO was also conducting an e-learning

programme for travel agents to keep them up-to-date on the latest offerings in Malaysia.

Elizabeth Wong, executive councillor of Selangor State Government and chairperson of the standing committee for tourism, consumer affairs and environment, said there were still connecting flights that would bring Europeans to Malaysia and the destination was becoming more affordable for them especially with the weakened Malaysia currency. Thirty per cent of Selangor's tourism traffic is from Europe.

Malaysia's inbound travel agents also remain sanguine

despite the loss of direct air connectivity. Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Malaysia, said: "We did a check and found that only 18 per cent of our guests travelled on Lufthansa. The rest came through a Middle Eastern airline. Thus, we don't expect this (suspension) to have a big impact (on business). Our partners have indicated that they will continue to sell Malaysia."

Alex Lee, CEO of Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours, foresees a slight drop in the high-end segment from Germany, but expects volume to be maintained among middle-class travellers and backpackers who are likely to fly with a Middle Eastern airline to Malaysia.



Wong: Weakened currency helps



Snapshots

# Asia's brightest stars

By Eugene Tang



Accor Hotels Singapore's Graham Wilson (centre) poised to take charge at ITB Berlin



Marina Mandarin Singapore's Abel Sng, Marina Orchard Singapore's Adeline Loh, Meritus Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa, Langkawi's Veronica See, Meritus Hotels & Resorts Singapore's Josephine Png, Meritus Hotels & Resorts UK's Guy Fotherby and dnata UK's Matthew Smith



Department of Tourism (DoT) Philippines' Marie Venus Tan, Tourism Promotion Board Philippines' Domingo Ramon Enerio III, Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines Germany's Melita Sta Maria-Thomeczek; DoT Philippines' Benito Bengzon Jr; Philippine Retirement Authority's Valentino Cabansag and DoT Philippines Germany's Margarita Patricia Valdes



Bangkok Airways' Puttipong Prasarttong-Osoth (centre) flies high with his team



Santika Indonesia's Cita Dewantoro and The Samaya Bali's Ray Clark



Diethelm Travel Group Thailand's Louise Lithgow, Diethelm Travel Malaysia's Manfred Kurz and Diethelm Travel Group Thailand's Nataly Wanhoff



Langkawi Development Authority's Rosnina Yaacob, Khalid Bin Ramli, Mohamad Zuhri Bin Abd Rashid and Mohd Ali Bin Makkit



(Seated) Harbour Plaza North Point Hong Kong's Amanda Chan and Harbour Grand Kowloon's Doris Li; (standing) The Kowloon Hotel's Ice Cheng, Harbour Plaza Metropolis Hong Kong's Luccetta Chan and Harbour Grand Hong Kong's Elaine Chow



Tourism Selangor's Md Saad Bin Mahsah, Selangor State Government's Elizabeth Wong and Tourism Selangor's Noorul Ashikin Bt Mohd Din



Tourism Perak's Kamil Dato' Shafie, Azleza Bt Hanzah and Zulhymi Effendy Bin Zakaria



Furama Hotels International Management Singapore's Gerard Lim and Shirlena Tan, and Furama Chiang Mai's Wirachart Wattthaphanich



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Kowloon Harbourfront Hotel  
The Kowloon Hotel  
Harbour Plaza Chongqing



Rambler Garden Hotel  
Rambler Oasis Hotel



**GRAND LUCAYAN**  
BAHAMAS



Best Local Hotel Chain



## News

# SriLankan keeps Europe

Airline restructures to keep afloat but European services remain, except Rome

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

IN the face of rising competition and tighter margins, SriLankan Airlines has embarked on a restructuring strategy that will see the carrier retaining its services to Europe while giving greater emphasis to Asia and growing Colombo as a regional hub.

“Our new board of directors inherited a bad situation,” said Ajith Dias, chairman of SriLankan Airlines, who was appointed in early 2015. “Our restructuring process will cut non-profitable routes, concentrate on the Far East and India, and maintain our position in Europe.”

Although Sri Lankan Airlines has been seeing “good” load factors on its European routes, services to low-yield Rome will be phased out from May 1 in order for the carrier to increase capacity on more commercially viable routes.

The airline will add a fifth weekly frequency to Frankfurt from July and retain its twice-daily London and four-times weekly Paris services. It will retain its slots in Rome for a re-assessment likely in two years’ time.

While the historic low global fuel prices have helped to stem losses, the current shaky economic and political outlook

in Europe is posing “uncertain times” for the largely unprofitable airline. “The off season starting from May will be critical for us, but so far it’s still looking good,” said Dias.

“We are still losing money now but we have made big progress in cutting losses last year. I expect we will take another two years to overcome (the losses).”

“Serious competition” from the Middle Eastern airlines has

weighed heavily on the carrier’s performance on routes out of Europe, admitted Dias, but the company is nevertheless keen to expand its codesharing partnerships with the Gulf carriers as it seeks to build Colombo as a regional air hub, particularly for traffic from the Middle East to South India and the Maldives.

The carrier is also undergoing a fleet development programme to replace its ageing A340 fleet with eight A350s on order. These will likely be deployed on operations to Europe and China when it takes delivery of them in 2016 and 2017.

With an estimated 40 per cent share of the country’s total seat capacity, Dias is confident that the “all-time high buoyancy for Sri Lanka” in terms of business and investment will work favourably for the country’s tourism sector.

The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority has set a target of four million arrivals by 2020, up from 1.8 million in 2015.



Our restructuring process will cut non-profitable routes, concentrate on the Far East and India, and maintain our position in Europe.

Ajith Dias  
Chairman, SriLankan Airlines

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## Quick takes on the UK and Swiss markets

Raini Hamdi speaks to three contract managers on business to the Far East this year



**Darren Lancaster**  
Contracts manager-Asia,  
Kuoni UK

**OUTLOOK** 2016 looks positive for our Asia arrivals. The sterling is strong against a number of Asian currencies thus delivering great value while airlift has improved to destinations such as Samui and Bali.

**CHALLENGES** Competitive alternative destinations; reversal of the current strength of the sterling; nervousness of the UK public to travel to Muslim destinations; general natural or political/geopolitical negative occurrences.

**BRIGHT SPOTS** Malaysia has had a very strong start to 2016, showing a growing confidence in not only the destination but also the national carrier. Bali grew exponentially in 2015, helped by new flights from the Middle East and this trend looks set to continue this year.

**DULL SPOTS** Vietnam seems to have run out of steam from the UK since the boom we experienced when Vietnam Airlines launched direct flights.

**STRATEGIES** We will stay competitive by continuing to work with our partners on securing great value annual contracts and tactical offers. Additionally we will continue to invest in online and offline marketing; increasing the emphasis on range and diversity of holidays will be a key focus for us this year. Also investing in expertise is vital, so we must continue to develop the knowledge of our frontline sales staff.



**David Carlaw**  
Product manager-Far East,  
Premier Holidays UK

**OUTLOOK** Bookings have really picked up especially for Thailand since December 15. We are showing an increase in all areas.

**CHALLENGES** The unknown. You never know what natural or human disaster is round the corner. If the area stays relatively quiet it should be a great year for it.

**BRIGHT SPOTS** Thailand is recovering much quicker than expected with excellent growth especially in relatively new areas like Khao Lak. Soft adventure and experiential sightseeing are also increasing as Thailand has a lot of repeat business.

Customers are booking the offers that are being led and promoted by tourist boards and airlines. This is why Thailand is doing so well; the Tourism Authority of Thailand is fantastic.

**DULL SPOTS** A number of traditional summer resorts are off limits for UK travellers, i.e. Tunisia and Egypt (Sharm el Sheikh). Some clients are also expressing concern over Turkey. This inflates prices in Spain and Portugal, making the Far East more attractive in comparison.

**STRATEGIES** NTO/Airline marketing support is crucial if those areas are to grab the business from longhaul destinations outside the Far East.



**Christoph Infanger**  
Product director-Asia,  
Africa, Arabia & Indian  
Ocean, Hotelplan/  
Travelhouse/Globus Reisen,  
Switzerland

**OUTLOOK** We had a slower pick up of bookings in 4Q2015 due to developments in European and world politics and general uncertainty. But since January the booking pattern has been picking up so I am optimistic that we will at least match the results of 2015.

**CHALLENGES** Switzerland is an interesting but rather small market. As there are no boundaries anymore with the Internet, we are in constant competition with our European neighbours. A hotel offering a rate to a German tour operator will find that same rate immediately in the Swiss market.

**BRIGHT SPOTS** Currently Indochina is high in demand, while Thailand has suffered a bit, particularly in 4Q2015.

But there too we have seen a pick up since the beginning of the year. Japan is still high in demand. Others more or less are stable.

**STRATEGIES** Rate parity is always an issue. But we rely on our strong position in the Swiss market, large retail network and long-lasting partnerships in the destinations to overcome this challenge.

The developments in European and world politics are moving more and more in the direction of confrontation instead of trying to find solutions. Regional conflicts are bad for business.



Intelligence

# German forward bookings for Asia on the rise

Land of the Rising Sun makes the largest gain, while China and the Maldives appear to be losing their shine, discovers *ForwardKeys*

Total German Arrivals in Asia on the Book: +2%



Asia-Pacific has seen 2.1% more forward bookings from Germany for travels during 1H2016, as of January 23.

The top 10 destinations remain unchanged; Japan stands out with an increase of 32.9% in forward bookings, while China and the Maldives are the only two destinations that recorded a dip of 8.6% and 11.4%, respectively, compared to 2015.

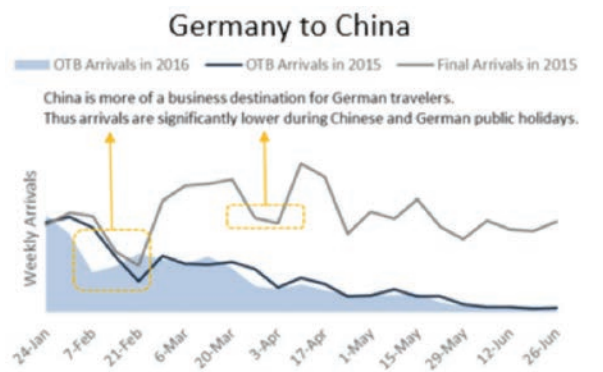
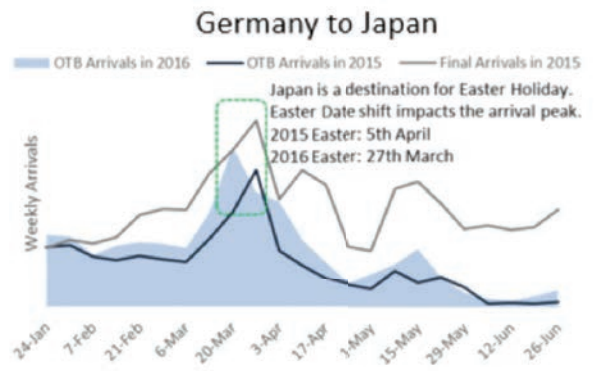
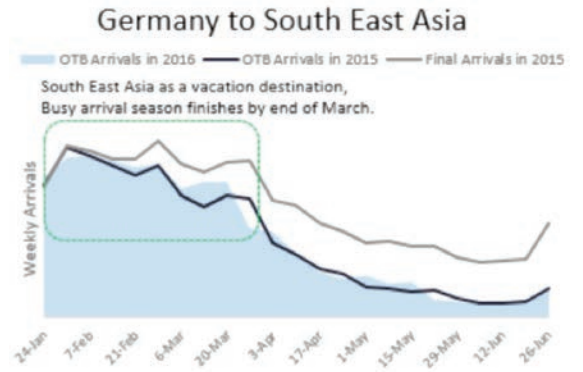
The Paris attacks had limited impact on German outbound to Asia. Prior to the incident on November 13, 2015, total forward bookings to Asia for 1H2016 was up by 6%. Post-attack volume remained similar to the previous year.

South-east Asia remains the darling region for winter escapes among German travellers. However, forward bookings show that the 2015/2016 peak season will end a little earlier than the previous year, as Easter shifts from April 5 in 2015 to March 27 this year.

Maintaining its popularity in 1H2016, Japan has seen a surge in forward bookings for arrivals in March and April, in line with the Easter holidays for German travellers, as well as the destination's popular cherry blossom season.

China continues to suffer weak German arrivals. Largely regarded a business destination among Germans, China has seen fewer business trips from Germany in the lead up to and after the 2016 Chinese New Year as compared to last year.

Leisure arrivals from Germany is weak too, as unlike other destinations in Asia, China usually sees significantly lower volume of German arrivals during German public holidays such as Easter.



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## Destination Philippines

# Still some way to paradise

Hopes for greater European tourist activity in the Philippines have been dampened by slowing growth in German tourist arrivals. Rosa Ocampo finds out why the draw of natural beauty alone is not enough for European travellers



El Nido bay and Cadlao island, Palawan, Philippines

Philippine inbound from Germany – its biggest European market after the United Kingdom – isn't growing as desired, with the travel trade pointing to high domestic prices and lack of direct flight from Europe as main culprits.

"The German market is becoming price sensitive and the Philippines price-wise is on the higher side (compared with some of its Asian neighbours)," explained Marjorie Aquino, senior sales and marketing manager, Blue Horizons Travel and Tours.

"You need connectivity," said Henry Schumacher, vice president for external affairs of the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP), who noted that KLM/Air France is the only European carrier that flies to Manila from the continent.

To counter the price and connectivity challenges, Aquino said her company tell clients that the Philippines is worth the trip because of its natural beauty and the topnotch service they will receive.

January-October 2015 statistics from the Department of Tourism showed that India has dislodged Germany as the Philippines' 12<sup>th</sup> biggest foreign market. Arrivals from Germany rose to 58,754, or 1.57 per cent more than the 57,847 over the same period in 2014.

The January-October 2015 arrival volume is lower than the yearly arrival volume over the past five years: 72,801 recorded for the whole of 2014; 70,749 for the whole of 2013; 67,023 for the whole

of 2012; 61,193 for the whole of 2011; and 58,725 for the whole of 2010.

The 1.57 per cent growth from January-October 2014 to January-October 2015 is slower compared to the growth rate of 2.61 per cent for the entire 2014; 5.86 per cent for the entire 2013; and 9.53 per cent for the entire 2012.

Despite the trend of slowing growth, Shan David, president of Corporate International Travel and Tours, said they have hit their 2015 targets from Germany and are positive for 2016 as they continue to work with the Department of Tourism in joining European travel tradeshow.

A challenge, though, is that the Philippines is "a bit expensive especially the hotels," she said.

And since there are not enough services from Europe to Manila and airlines are necessary for tourists to move among the country's many island destinations, it is pricier to fly to the Philippines than to other Asian destinations like Thailand and Indonesia.

For instance, David pointed out that it's cheaper for Germans to go to Bali where there are direct flights.

Moreover, a three- to four-star hotel that can be booked for US\$150 abroad can cost between US\$200 to US\$250 in the Philippines, she compared.

ECCP's Schumacher, who has been a resident of the Philippines for the last 38 years, said a concerted effort is needed to put the Philippines on the radar of European travellers.

Schumacher said it's also a question of what kind of tourism the Philippines wants – mass tourism or quality tourism that don't trample on beaches and other local attractions.

ECCP's efforts to form a European carrier committee came amid unfulfilled expectations that more carriers would fly direct from Manila to Europe after the Economic Union lifted the travel ban on Philippines Airlines in late 2013.

Since then, only Philippine Airlines launched a direct flight to London while KLM/Air France flies to Manila from Holland via Taiwan.

The ban on remaining airlines from the Philippines was completely lifted in 2015.

Blue Horizons' Aquino said that tourism from Europe has picked up recently and the top agents that they handle in Germany are pushing more for the Philippines, but they need "more flights".

Aquino said it takes longer hours for German tourists to arrive in the Philippines, up to 17 hours to Palawan and to other Philippine islands.

Germans are known for being big spenders but have become a bit price sensitive since the European economic crisis, Aquino pointed out. A typical itinerary for them is a 5D/4N to northern destinations like the Cordillera, Sagada, Banaue and Baguio then a stay in Manila by coach and a week on the beach.

Strong destinations are El Nido and Coron in Palawan, Boracay, Cebu and Bohol combined, Siquijor and Dumaguete.

## VIEWPOINTS

How do you plan to grow business from German-speaking markets this year?



**Odette A Huang,**  
group director of sales and marketing, The Discovery Leisure

German-speaking markets are one of the Philippines' top high-yield markets, and we will continue to mine them. We will focus our efforts on targeting divers who are drawn to Palawan as a destination. Meanwhile, we are also actively growing our German corporate base for our hotels.



**AA Yaptinchay,**  
general manager, Kirschner Travel Manila

We are coming up with more packages this year that are designed with the German-European customers in mind. We will leverage our social media presence and do promotions, and plan to be part of ITB this month. We are now an accredited agency of the Philippine Department of Tourism.

### Destination in numbers

## 100,719

Philippine arrivals from German-speaking countries of Austria, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland for the period Jan-Oct 2015

## 2.29 per cent

Market share of these tourists to total Philippine arrivals

## 2.91 per cent

Percentage growth in arrivals from the five German-speaking countries for Jan-Oct 2015 over the same period in 2014





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# Destination Philippines

## HOW TO SELL

Now's the best time to visit Davao while it is yet undiscovered by the masses. This destination in the southern Philippines has everything whether you are a culture seeker or an adrenaline junkie.

**STAY** 214-key **Park Inn by Radisson Davao**, one of the few international hotel brands in the city, features vibrant colours, warm service and work stations. Located in the city right next to SMX Convention Center and Lanang premiere shopping mall, it is just a few minutes away from the airport.

**SEE** **The Philippine Eagle Centre** is home to a number of endangered Philippine eagles, many other bird species, mammals, and reptiles.

Also, **Eden Nature Park and Resort**, once barren due to illegal logging, is now an 80-hectare attraction teeming with over 100,000 pine trees, and filled with flowers, herb gardens and wildlife.

Visit in the third week of August for the yearly Kadayawan Festival, a grand thanksgiving for gifts of harvest and nature. Highlights include agricultural produce, parades and performances by tribal communities.



From left: Eden sky bike; Jack's Ridge

**DO** In the air, a sky bike ride, zipline, sky swing, and cable car are available. At sea, besides the usual beach and seafront activities, one can attempt scuba diving, snorkeling, wakeboarding, wild water rafting, tubing and cruising. On land, try golfing, horseback riding with local cowboys, trekking, hiking, spelunking, mountain climbing, ride pillion on the local

habal habal motorcycles, or visit mountains, waterfalls, bat caves and more.

**EAT** A haven for foodies, Davao is home to exotic fruits like durian, marang, mangosteen, lanzones and pomelo. A must-try for adventurous palates is *bagaybay* (tuna milt). Go for an assortment of other tuna-based cuisine

such as grilled tuna jaw, tuna marinated in vinegar and garlic then deep fried, tuna roe and buttered tuna. Also try *balbacua* (braised ox feet, skin or tail), braised *carabao* (water buffalo), raw fish marinated in vinegar, and of course, sisig (chopped pig's face and ears with chicken liver). Then end the day at popular local joint **Jack's Ridge**, which features panoramic views of the city.

## WHAT'S NEW

### 1 Luxury Kulinarya bus

Corporate International Travel & Tours' culinary tours feature a tour bus that provides an experience comparable to the business class experience on some airlines.

With a maximum capacity of 22 guests, the spacious bus also has a small television and headset in every seat. Stewards serve coffee, soda, juice and, at the end of the journey, wine.

One of the tours include a breakfast stop at Sulyap Cafe in Laguna, a refurbished ancestral house with a museum, or lunch at the pottery garden of renowned potter Ugu Bigyan in Quezon.

The Pampanga city package includes other interesting locales such as lunch set in a huge garden at Abe's big nipa hut, as well as dinner at Ben Lim, a

home garage converted into a restaurant.

### 2 Tribal Immersion

Calamianes Expeditions and Ecotours will launch in February a tribal immersion tour in La Jala in Coron, Palawan.

The walking village tour glimpses at the daily life of the Tagbanua indigenous community as they go about in their houses built above water. Common local activities include cockfighting, fish net weaving and boat building. An interesting local produce is the coffee, which features a roasting process that combines coffee beans with sugar.

### 3 Novotel Manila Araneta Center

This newly opened 401-key hotel is a

much welcome addition to the city considering the room shortage problem in Quezon City.

New dining concepts Food Exchange Manila, where dishes are prepared at live cooking stations, and Gourmet Bar by Novotel, which uses locally grown produce from an organic farm, are featured prominently.

### 4 Mövenpick Resort Boracay

This upscale property, rebranded from the former Sol Marina Resort, reopened in December 2015 with a new private beach. The resort has 333 rooms clustered in three buildings that surrounds a central lagoon pool.

Key features include family rooms, a kids club, games area for teens, several

dining outlets and meeting facilities for up to 450 guests.

### 5 Tryp by Wyndham

Design and style take centre stage at South-east Asia's first Tryp by Wyndham Hotel, which is slated to open at the Mall of Asia Complex in Manila early this year. The hotel hopes to lure groups, FITs as well as young leisure and business travellers looking for downtown lifestyle accommodations.

At least eight Tryp hotels are being planned throughout the country within the next 10 years by master franchisee Microtel Inns & Suites Philippines, who currently operates Wyndham's Microtel-branded properties in the Philippines.







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## Destination Myanmar

# A country in gradual transition

DMCs are confident that the number of German-speaking visitors to the land of a thousand pagodas will continue to increase by leaps and bounds, writes **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

International confidence has grown as the country takes baby steps towards democracy; Bagan, an ancient city in Mandalay, pictured



Having seen another record-breaking year in 2015 for tourism in Myanmar, the travel trade has even greater expectations for this year, as international confidence in the country has risen following the landslide victory won by Aung San Suu Kyi in the elections last November.

Myanmar attracted more than 4.5 million in 2015, according to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. Of this, European nationals accounted for 171,544 visitors, led by the UK with 35,412 visitors, followed by France and Germany with 34,766 and 27,028 visitors respectively.

Aung Myat Kyaw, vice chairman of Myanmar Tourism Federation (MTF), commented: "The German market has grown about 20 per cent last year. Traditionally, German-speaking markets are reliable tourist source markets for Myanmar and the growth is likely to remain high in the coming season too."

Myanmar Tourism Marketing (MTM), the marketing arm of MTF, is harbouring grander ambitions for the destination at ITB Berlin this year.

Phyoe Wai Yarzar, chairman of MTM, said: "The German market has been growing sustainably for the last two dec-

ades. This year, the Myanmar Pavilion at ITB Berlin will depict Kayah State's theme to put the destination on the tourist map."

Meanwhile, trade players are also encouraged by the good performance put up by the German-speaking markets in 2015.

"Among the European markets, the German market is our second strongest after the Italian market, followed by the UK market," said Eugene Yeo, director of sales & marketing at Sedona Hotel Yangon.

"Sedona Hotel Yangon works in collaboration with Meiers Weltreisen and Dertour. We are pleased with how these agents have helped us reach travellers from the German-speaking markets and create growth among these audiences."

Sentiments among DMCs are positive, with agency chiefs spoken to keen to strengthen their efforts in courting what is already a major source market in Europe.

Germany posted a nine per cent growth in 2015, making it the third largest European market in sales for Exo Travel Myanmar after the UK and France, shared German sales manager, Wah Wah Lin.

She added: "Some 90 per cent of German travellers prefer nature and culture, and always like to include at least a short

walking tour. They love beach stays too, with about 65 per cent of them taking beach extensions."

German travellers' preference for beach holidays has given rise to greater interest and longer length of stay in Ngapali Beach, an up-and-coming destination along the Bay of Bengal, observed Lilli Saxer, managing director of Diethelm Travel Myanmar.

To capture more business from the German-speaking markets, Saxer intends to promote upcountry areas like Bagan, Mandalay, Inle Lake, Kalaw and Pindaya for the monsoon season (May to September), during which hotels offer good value for money, queues are non-existent at main attractions and the vegetation is lush than the dry season. New products like Loikaw, home of the long neck ladies, makes a new hiking destination that can be combined with Lake Inle, she added.

Likewise, the German-speaking market is "growing steadily" for Khiri Travel Myanmar although a lack of German language classes outside of Yangon – and hence a paucity of German-speaking guides – has led the company turning to English-speaking guides upcountry instead.

General manager Edwin Briels commented: "We see that more German-

speaking clients are fine to have an English-speaking guide and therefore we are able to provide more local guides all around the country a job opportunity, which I think is a more sustainable thing to do. We love to have our clients meet at least three or four different guides each from their own region." – **additional reporting by Sid Dartha**

### Destination in numbers

## 27,028

The number of visitors from Germany arriving through the Yangon gateway in 2015, the third largest source market from Europe

## 1.7%

The percentage growth of arrival numbers from Germany in 2015 as compared to 2014

## 2.5%

The share, in percentage, of the German market in 2015

### HOW TO SELL

**DO** Yangon is home to the largest collection of colonial-era buildings in South-east Asia and a heritage walking tour with the non-profit **Yangon Heritage Trust** will reveal the history of the city's storied past.

**EAT** A charming establishment on the second floor of a restored colonial building on Pansodan Road, **Rangoon Tea House** offers such Burmese staples as *mohinga* (noodles in fish broth), *laphet* (tea leaf salad), samosas and a wide variety of tea blends in a comfortable, buzzy setting.

**SEE** A visit to Yangon is incomplete without a stop at **Shwedagon Pagoda**, a 99m-high gilded stupa that is arguably Myanmar's most iconic landmark. Visit the pagoda at dawn or sunset when it becomes beautifully illuminated and temperatures are cooler.

**STAY** Dating back to the 1920s, **Belmond Governor's Residence** is an imposing teak mansion hotel surrounded by verdant greenery and lotus pools. The property features 47 rooms, all boasting elegant teak furniture, hardwood floor and fan-cooled verandas.



### VIEWPOINTS

How do you plan to grow business from German-speaking markets this year?



**Edwin Briels, general manager, Khiri Travel Myanmar**

Khiri Travel Myanmar recently hired a German national (Stefan

Scheerer) as our customer care manager. We will have a booth at ITB Berlin and we are planning more sales calls in German-speaking countries to showcase our creative new programmes in Myanmar. We will make sure the trip is not only about visiting temples and pagodas but about meeting the local people and having fun.



**Eugene Yeo, director of sales & marketing, Sedona Hotel Yangon**

Sedona Hotel Yangon will

continue to leverage local agents, as well as tap the expertise of German agents in order to market the Sedona brand this year. We have a German representative who is actively reaching out to major tour operators in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In addition, we will be attending ITB Berlin and conducting sales calls to reinforce our efforts. We are excited to share more about Sedona Hotel Yangon as well as our sister property, Sedona Hotel Mandalay, in Berlin.

### WHAT'S NEW

#### 1 Sedona Hotel Yangon

Sedona Hotel Yangon has soft-launched its new 29-storey Inya Wing featuring 431 guest rooms and suites, bringing total room capacity at Sedona to 779. Inya Wing is linked to the existing hotel block via a connector which comprises a new retail arcade. A new elevated podium also connects the two blocks, and houses a terrace featuring a swimming pool, the Real Fitness Signature Club and an all-day restaurant D'Cuisine.



remote places on the Irrawaddy River not accessible by large ships. The *Anawrahta* is modelled after a turn-of-the-century vintage steamer mixing Burmese motifs and British colonial-style décor. The ship also features a bar, lounge, restaurant, spa, gym and Jacuzzi plunge-pool.

#### 2 Anawrahta

Vietnam-based Heritage Line has recently added *Anawrahta* in Myanmar to its fleet of river cruisers. Having launched its maiden journey in September 2015, the 23-cabin luxury vessel will take guests to





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Marina Mandarin Singapore ranks high on the list of all-time favourite hotels amongst avid Formula One fans as it is ideally situated on the trackside of the annual Singapore Grand Prix Formula One race.

The hotel boasts one of the largest open atriums in Southeast Asia, soaring through 21 storeys and permeated by natural light. Each of the hotel's 575 guestrooms and suites overlooks the atrium, and features a private balcony overlooking stunning views of the famous Singapore harbour and the city skyline.

Food and beverage options in the hotel include *AquaMarine*, an all-day dining restaurant featuring a Halal-certified buffet spread of Asian and international cuisines; *Peach Blossoms*, renowned for its authentic Cantonese fare; *Atrium Lounge* and *Café Mocha* for cosy tête-à-têtes; and the world-famous *Ruth's Chris Steak House*.

Offering a respite from the hustle and bustle of the city is *Amarin Spa*. The dedicated spa facility offers holistic beauty and massage therapies, as well as access to the hotel's 25-metre natural mineral water pool.

Marina Mandarin Singapore also offers over 20,000 sq ft of meeting and function spaces that spell stylish versatility and modern convenience. Business facilities include the *Meritus Club Lounge*, where guests can enjoy exclusive privileges and preferential service.

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## Destination Japan

# Unveiling hidden treasures

JNTO is working hard to take the German-speaking markets deeper into Japan where more fun awaits. By **Julian Ryall**



Playing up Japan's ski slopes may win the hearts of German travellers

**T**he German-speaking market is one that has not been tapped as extensively as others by Japanese travel companies, but an increasing number of firms are keen to reach out with products and services designed to meet the needs of German travellers.

Just over 152,000 German travellers arrived in the first 11 months of 2015, up 16 per cent from the previous year. These figures are impressive, but the UK, France, Italy and Sweden all saw larger percentage growth in 2015 than the previous year.

That suggests that Germany is ready for a blitz by Japanese travel companies.

"Germany is our second-largest market in Europe after Britain, although a high percentage of our clients are business travellers," said Shinya Kurosawa, a director and head of global business for JTB Corp.

The company took over the operations of Jalpak International from Japan Airlines in 2014 and now has 85 staff in its

offices in Frankfurt and Dusseldorf, promoting Japan as a destination.

Kurosawa observed that spring and autumn seasons are most popular with German travellers. "Cherry blossom season seems to be a favourite, but they are also interested in the culture, the history, the cuisine and so on. The challenge for us now is to increase the number of products that we provide and to overcome broader industry problems, such as the shortage of hotel rooms in the popular tourist cities of Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka," he said.

"One way to do that is to take visitors to areas that are away from the traditional destinations, to the local areas that are very different from the cities but are unique and attractive," he added.

According to the Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO), the majority of German visitors to Japan are FIT travellers in their 30s or 40s. Many are couples or friends, with a few family groups, almost

certainly as a result of the cost of travelling to Japan from Europe. German arrivals are also relatively wealthy and are attracted by the opportunity to witness Japanese culture, traditional art and heritage.

"Our statistics show that more than 61 per cent of German visitors are first-timers to Japan, but we expect the number of repeat visitors to increase from now on," said Katsuaki Ishizaki, head of the European division of JNTO in Tokyo.

For Germans on their first trip to Japan, the Golden Route of Tokyo, Hakone, Kyoto and Osaka by Shinkansen is the preferred itinerary, but the JNTO office in Frankfurt is working hard to encourage German tourists to venture further afield.

And Ishizaki believes the potential is significant.

"We have (not) been able to fully promote the fun of Japan to the German market yet and we believe there are many more things we can do," he said. "For instance, on top of the major attractions such as Japanese cuisine, sake, ryokan and onsen, we are planning to create plans for lovers of outdoor activities, such as cycling, trekking and hiking, that will appeal to German visitors."

Fred Dawance, general manager of Okushiga-Kogen Resort in Nagano Prefecture, agrees that skiers from German-speaking nations could be drawn to a country that is building a reputation as one of the best ski destinations in the world. "We did not have a huge number of guests from German-speaking nations in 2015, although we did have a party from the Austrian Embassy in Tokyo recently. But the potential for a town like ours is huge," he said.

## VIEWPOINTS

How do you plan to grow business from German-speaking markets this year?



**Dima Azarov, sales and marketing executive, Sapporo Convention Bureau**  
With more visitors heading further beyond

Tokyo and Kyoto to discover the hidden charms of Japan, we are hoping that promoting Sapporo's reputation as the 'Beer Capital' and 'Snow Wonderland' of the nation will attract more German visitors.

**James Mundy, PR and marketing manager, Inside-Japan Tours**



We are expanding our offices to cope with growing demand from our UK and European markets, including an increase in customers from German-speaking countries. Forward sales for Europe suggest that there will be another considerable increase in travellers to Japan, continuing the trend in anticipation of the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

## WHAT'S NEW

### 1 Japan Explorer Pass

To encourage visitors to go beyond the typical tourist routes, Japan Airlines has introduced a new discounted domestic flight fare for overseas travellers. The Japan Explorer Pass costs 10,800 yen (US\$91.60) and will transport visitors from Hokkaido in the far north to the semi-tropical islands of Okinawa at the other end of the archipelago.

### 2 Grids Nihombashi East

Budget travellers will welcome the opening of a second Grids hostel. The eight-storey Grids Nihombashi East operates on the concept of an airport terminal, bringing people from all over the world together. The property has six floors of dormitory-style rooms, including two solely for women, a further two only for men, as well as a number of more upmarket rooms. The lounge and restaurant-bar are designed to encourage strangers to interact.

### 3 The Kiroro, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel

Starwood has launched its 10<sup>th</sup> brand in the Asia-Pacific region with the opening of The Kiroro, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel in Hokkaido. The 282-room hotel is located at the base of The Kiroro Resort, regarded as one of the best powder skiing destinations in the world. The hotel has four res-



The Kiroro, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel

taurants serving a variety of international cuisine and 1,395m<sup>2</sup> of function space, including a grand ballroom.

### 4 Arts Trail tour

Japan will host three major Art Triennale events in 2016, in the prefectures of Aichi and Saitama as well as dotted across the islands of the Seto Inland Sea. InsideJapan Tours is introducing its new Arts Trail tour this year, which will focus on the third Setouchi Triennale Arts Festival, taking place for around a month three times during the year.

### 5 Electronic Toll Collection card

The operator of toll highways in Hokkaido – renown for its snow in winter and balmy summer days – have introduced a fixed-rate expressway pass for foreign visitors. Available through 10 car rental companies in Hokkaido, the automatic Electronic Toll Collection card dramatically cuts travel cost throughout the prefecture.

## HOW TO SELL

**DO** For the 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, the sweeping gardens that surround the **Adachi Museum of Art** have been selected as the best Japanese gardens in the world.

The gardens, in Shimane Prefecture, undulate over more than 165,000m<sup>2</sup> and incorporate ponds, mosses, two tea-houses, pine trees and expanses of delicately raked gravel. Dotted throughout the parkland are places to simply sit, admire, ponder and, for some, to meditate. The gardens also has three Michelin stars, making it a must-see destination.

**SEE** Kyoto Prefecture is famous for its temples and traditions, but its enclave, described as The Venice of Japan, remains something of a secret. The sleepy fishing village of **Ine Town** is built on stilts above the

inlet and has been designated as a protected area for "important traditional buildings."

**EAT** **Tsuta** has triggered a culinary earthquake by becoming the first ramen restaurant in the world to win a much-coveted Michelin star in December. Owner and head chef Yuki Onishi serves bowls of hearty, tasty noodles for as little as 850 yen. Be there early, as the restaurant is tiny – only nine seats are available.

**STAY** **Hotel Universal Port** will on April 1 open Japan's first Minions Room, replete with the lovable characters from the *Despicable Me* animated movie series. One of the official hotels of Universal Studios Japan in Osaka, the property will decorate the entire room with Minions and fit it with missile-shaped beds and sofas that resemble crocodiles.



Ine town in Kyoto



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# Critically acclaimed

Terrorist threats have hurt longhaul demand out of Macau, while Malaysian traffic to Europe remains vibrant despite a weakened ringgit, and pilgrimage sites are rising in popularity among Filipino travellers



Europe is popular with people from Macau due to its history and culture; Tower Bridge in London pictured here



## MACAU

In the first 11 months of 2015, Macau government statistics revealed that 1,378,000 of outbound residents used travel agencies, down by 1.5 per cent year-on-year.

Shorthaul travel dominated as 119,000 outbound travellers used agents, while about 49,000 joined group tours, with the majority travelling to mainland China (72.9 per cent of total), followed by Taiwan (eight per cent) and Korea (4.5 per cent).

Hong Kong-based Muse Travel, director, Suki Sin, said: "We didn't have many longhaul travel demands; they were mostly for shorthaul.

"It's typical to have couples asking for European honeymoon trips, but since the terrorist attack in France, numbers of enquiries from Macau is zero. Despite proactive promotion and advertisements, I am not optimistic for this year and reckon it may take some time to recover."

According to tour operators, peak seasons for longhaul are summer holidays, Chinese New Year and Christmas, when consumers are able to take longer time off for far-flung destinations.

EGL Tours Macau's general manager, Sabina Ieong, pointed out popular destinations among the people of Macau were western, northern and eastern Europe.

She said: "There is a constant demand,

especially from those who have been to South-east Asia before, to look for somewhere new and exotic."

The lack of direct longhaul connections at Macau International Airport drove locals to join group tours in Hong Kong or board international flights at Hong Kong International Airport.

Ieong added: "In 2016, the popular spots remain similar to 2015 but given the terrorist attacks in Europe, it's hard to predict.

"From past experience, 20 to 30 per cent of summer traffic go for longhaul. An additional factor that might affect outbound travel is the currency exchange. When the euro dropped last year, our longhaul bookings surged and we received bookings every day. If this happens this year, it'd be good for us."

Estoril Tours Travel Agency's director of sales, Johnny Choi, said: "Positive economic development has lifted income levels and made overseas travel affordable. So far, the top destinations are Italy, the UK and France given their culture and history. There's also reduced emphasis on shopping.

"As the ISIL threat continues, our bookings and enquiries have fallen. Safety is currently a priority. Prior to the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015, Macau longhaul performed very well and this upward trend was seen over the last few years."

Choi lamented: "Now, we can't do much to push the market. (We are hopeful that) maybe six months later, the demand will return." – **Prudence Lui**



## MALAYSIA

The ringgit may have weakened considerably against the greenback, but that has not deterred Malaysians from pursuing further education, going on business or taking leisure trips to Europe. Outbound agents from Malaysia specialising in Europe said demand remained strong, despite the substantial weakening of the ringgit.

The ringgit had shrivelled from RM3.49 to the US dollar in January 2015 to RM4.45 in September 2015, while the exchange rate on January 9, 2016 was RM4.50.

John Chan, business consultant at Kris International TravelTours, said: "Travel demand for education and business purposes to the UK, France, Switzerland and Germany was strong in 2015 and I believe it will continue to be strong in 2016. A British education is always sought after. Malaysians are also travelling to Germany for engineering and the sciences, while Austria and Switzerland is known for its hospitality industry."

Eddy Lim, manager, Malaysian Harmony Tours & Travel, said demand for group tours to Europe remained strong in 2015 despite the weakened currency.

He said: "Many Middle Eastern carriers flying between the Far East and Europe via the Middle East provided promotional fares almost throughout the year. During the off-peak season you can get return airfares from RM2,000 (US\$481)."

The low fares make Europe very attractive even though our tour fares has increased by an average of five per cent over 2014.

Lim said tours to Greece and Scandinavian countries were popular during the European summer. For winter, spring and autumn, there was strong demand for full

board tours covering six countries. Switzerland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium and the UK were popular with Malaysians.

He said: "Our full board tours includes entrance tickets and are very popular among Malaysian travellers who like everything arranged for them in advance. We've seen a trend where there is a growing number of adults between the ages of 25 to 45 taking these tours as well. In the past, it used to be dominated by retirees."

Due to safety and security concerns, Lim predicted that for 2016, tours to the UK, France and Belgium may see a slowdown. However, tours to mono Italy or dual destinations Spain and Portugal will do well as these places are deemed safe.

For 2016, Malaysian Harmony will be promoting new destinations such as the Balkans, and Finland to see the Northern Lights in winter.

Apple Vacations & Conventions group managing director, Desmond Lee, said demand to Europe increased by 20 per cent last year compared to 2014. He attributed this to cash rich travellers having more time to travel during a slowdown. Popular destinations in 2015 were tours to Italy and the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland.

For 2016, the company will be promoting eastern Europe and the Balkans such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Bulgaria and Macedonia as new destinations, especially to those who have already been to central and northern Europe.

Lee added: "We think these destinations will do well because the rich are always looking for new and exotic places to visit. As these are new destinations for the Malaysian market, many first-timers would rather go on group tours as they may not feel comfortable travelling on their own." – **S Puvaneswary**

Greece is a popular choice for Malaysians during the European summer; Santorini pictured here







# PHILIPPINES

Although Philippine outbound to Europe has eased a bit, there will always be demand for Paris, its top draw.

Rajah Travel Corp's chief Aileen Clemente doesn't think the terrorist attacks in Paris last year will hamper the growth of this city – which to Filipinos is an “institutional destination”.

Clemente also pointed out that security concerns are “everywhere in the world, and not just confined to one destination”.

Paris, together with London, were top choices for most Filipinos who went to Europe last year and this trend is likely to continue this year.

“To many, these cities are top draws when you hear the world ‘Europe,’” said Rowena O Baltazar, sales manager, Adam's Express Travel.

Pilgrimage sites, notably Rome, will remain high on the list of predominantly Catholic Filipinos. A growing number of pilgrimage tours also include new sites in eastern Europe, parts of Russia and Turkey.

Travel consultants are bullish this year owing to new flights connecting the Philippines to Europe – Emirates from Dubai to Cebu via Clark in March and Turkish Airlines to Manila last year.

While these new air services boost travel from Europe to the Philippines, they're also alternatives for Filipinos flying to



St Peter's Basilica in Rome, pictured here, is a big draw for Catholic Filipinos

Europe, said Matt Poonin, manager, sales and marketing of Cebu-based Travelite Travel & Tours.

They can take Emirates' and Turkish Airlines' onward connections to various parts of Europe, he added.

Ian Evasco, retail team leader – travel products, Adventure International Tour, said travel agencies are looking for new European destinations to diversify their products.

Evasco also said that well-travelled tourists who have already seen major European destinations were also looking for new destinations as they become more adventurous and global.

O Baltazar for instance, noted rising demand to see Aurora Borealis in Iceland

and Greenland, as well as go on European cruises. As such, the company is coming up with new destinations in the Balkan Peninsula and the Adriatic Coast.

Several factors like the world political situation and terrorist threats, however, are impacting travel demand for Europe, including the competition posed by Japan and South Korea.

Travel consultants interviewed during the Philippine Travel Agency Association's Emerging Outbound Destination B2B in September last year, noted that travellers favour these two Asian destinations as Europe is expensive and difficult to obtain visas.

They pointed out that tourists can experience both snow and winter in Japan

and South Korea. Both countries have eased their visa requirements and are heavily marketing and promoting attractive packages in the Philippines.

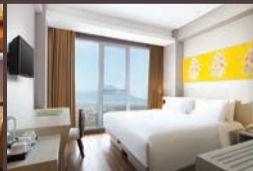
Other competitors of Europe are New Zealand to which the Philippine Airlines recently launched inaugural flights to, and Australia which both Philippine Airlines and Cebu Pacific are already flying to.

O Baltazar said that although middle-class Filipinos and a growing economy spur longhaul travel, special airfare and reasonably-priced hotel accommodation will be the bigger catalysts to the rise of travel, not just to Europe but elsewhere in the world. Exchange rate fluctuations can also be a big factor, she said. – **Rosa Ocampo**



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## Analysis

# All you need is love

A small hotel buy can translate into something bigger. Raini Hamdi reports from Liverpool, where Millennium & Copthorne (M&C)'s acquisition of the world's only Beatles-inspired hotel has been completed

The price of £13.8 million (US\$21 million) which M&C paid for the Hard Days Night Hotel (HDNH) in Liverpool is seen as 'small change' for its executive chairman Kwek Leng Beng, but expectations of the value the hotel can bring to M&C, and to Liverpool, are not as puny.

The chain believes the hotel can be even more profitable but, more than that, it has gained a unique marketing instrument that it can use to drum up awareness of its 24 hotels in Britain and Europe. And *Imagine*, in the future there could be other HDNHs in places where The Beatles has a following. That's practically everywhere.

Aloysius Lee, CEO of M&C, is already toying with two travel trade functions in New York and Singapore hinging on HDNH to promote M&C hotels. He is also persuading Asian tour operators to launch a London and Liverpool itinerary. The drive between the two cities is a long three hours, but the pain can be lessened for Asian clients especially with a stop at the Bicester Designer Outlet Village located halfway through the journey, he said.

Lee needs the international market to fill the hotel during weekdays, when occupancy languishes, while weekends are a full house thanks to the domestic market.

Liverpool's Lord Mayor, Tony Conception, hopes M&C will be successful in bringing more Asian visitors to Liverpool. The city has shed its poor image and has been regenerating itself since 2008, when it was conferred the European Capital of Culture status, he said.

A £1 billion shopping mall, One Liverpool, has opened. So has an exhibition centre on the waterfront with a capacity for 6,000 pax. Next door are a convention centre and a concert arena. Hotel room count has tripled to 7,700 today, from 2,300 in 2008. A partnership among the City Council, police and emergency services to keep the city centre and the night-time economy safe has helped Liverpool earn a Citysafe certification by an independent body year after year, said Conception.

Things are looking up or, as Lee put it, "are coming to a tipping point" for

Liverpool, part of a region George Osborne called the "Northern Powerhouse". The Chancellor, in China recently, opened a pitch book on more than £24 billion of investment opportunities in the region.

And Liverpool can do with continued growth. The City Council has racked up a debt of some £20 million from the reconstruction since 2008 while unemployment rates are still high, City of Liverpool statistics show.

### Come together

An estimated 600,000 people each year visit Liverpool to retrace the footsteps of the Fab Four: John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. They go to Beatles Story, the world's largest permanent exhibition devoted to the lives and times of The Beatles; on a Magical Mystery Tour in a psychedelic bus that stops at world-famous Beatles sites from Penny Lane to Strawberry Field; to the Cavern Club where The Beatles had played nearly 300 times; to the International Beatleweek Festival, the biggest *Come Together* in the world featuring over 200 bands from across the globe.

Said Dave Jones, owner of the Cavern Club: "It was obvious to me back in the '80s, when tourism was first included in the economic planning, that Liverpool's USP was Beatles by a mile, followed by sports, beautiful buildings, museums, maritime history, etc. But people weren't going to come just to look at buildings; there had to be something global, and which no other city could claim birthrights to. For me, it's a no-brainer: why waste time selling cathedrals when you've got brand Beatles?"

Strangely though, no one had thought to come up with a Beatles-themed hotel until Tony Criss, who acquired the lease on a heritage building next to the Cavern Club in 2006, developed HDNH from scratch and opened the hotel in 2008.

Criss put it up in the market last March; it was speculated Marriott's Autograph Collection was in talks with him in 2013 but nothing came of it. One look at the hotel and Kwek was sold, closing the deal in under two hours and paying more than the reported asking price of £11 million for the 113 years left on the hotel's lease.

Fundamentally, HDNH is a stylish design hotel that looks brand new and has the wherewithals to please the modern leisure and business traveller. It rests easily in the lifestyle category – the current rage of hotel chains which are scared to lose out on the New Gen. A night's stay shows it is neither a tacky theme hotel nor a Beatles museum hotel that takes itself too seriously. On the contrary, it gives the sense it is paying homage to a legend in subtle, creative ways and, being in the birthplace of The Beatles, achieves a sense of place that many hotels can only dream about.

"When we opened, we called ourselves a Beatles-themed hotel and that was a mistake. People think theme hotels are tacky; trying to convince them we're a serious hotel is a challenge. That's why we call ourselves a Beatles-inspired hotel," said general manager Michael Dewey. "No matter how much you tell them how stylish it is, they've got to cross the threshold to believe it."

In the seven years of operation, many did. "We compete with other brands such as Hilton and Crowne Plaza and outperformed them on all three measures, not that often on occupancies but always on rates and RevPAR. And we did that as an independent, i.e., without M&C, and without affilia-

tions or alliances, but with brand Beatles," said Dewey, who claimed an AOR of 78 per cent and an ARR of £89 in a year, 80 per cent leisure and 20 per cent corporate.

The city's AOR rose to 75.5 per cent last year from 71.2 per cent in 2013, while RevPAR rose to £46.33 in 2014 from £41 in 2013.

Americans are HDNH's biggest foreign market, and there is a sprinkling of Asian customers. Visit Liverpool data shows 62 per cent of visitors are domestic and 38 per cent are international, mainly from Ireland, Spain, Australia, America and France. While Liverpool continues to see growth in domestic arrivals and visitors from France and America, those from Japan, Ireland, Spain and Germany are continuing to decline. The smaller Asian markets such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Hong Kong are also on a decline.

The entry of an international chain with Asian roots is akin to *Here Comes the Sun* for HDNH and Liverpool.

Said Dewey: "My market is everywhere, as everywhere in the world there are Beatles fans. But as an independent, we don't have loads of money. And that's why M&C suddenly gives us an international platform. I can't see us doing anything but grow from strength to strength. We will be the busiest hotel, and there will be an increase in international customers."

The big question, however, is whether The Beatles continues to resonate with younger travellers. Dewey said: "If you're a Beatles fan, you're 65 years old plus, easily. But the generation span that loves the songs ranges from 12 years old to... old.

Just take the Magical Mystery Tour and you'll see how extraordinary the age span is."

Julia Baird, John Lennon's sister, told the *Daily*: "It's less and less about The Beatles per se, or each individual in it. It's more and more about the music. Why do people study Beethoven? Because the music is wonderful and it transcends geographic boundaries – many Chinese are studying it and are excellent at it. Beatles is going that way. The music lives on."

As for what she would hope M&C would do with HDNH, Baird said: "Not change things too much. Not put the Millennium stamp on it. That would be a mistake. It is its own brand. You've got a format here and it really works, you wouldn't have bought it if it didn't."

"Maybe you could repeat it in New York, Tokyo, Shanghai or Beijing but don't change it. I'm sure there's a market for this everywhere." In other words,

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# A firm choice

Serviced residence operators believe they are a more resilient accommodation model that can withstand shocks, reports [Raini Hamdi](#)



**Lisa Rauch,**  
director of sales-  
APAC, Oakwood  
Worldwide

**Demand** For serviced apartments, demand is driven not merely by economic growth but globalisation and the need for talent, which lead to the movement of people. For example, over the past decade demand for serviced apartments across Asia-Pacific grew 25 per cent despite the global economic recession.

Therefore, in spite of projected lower economic growth for Asia-Pacific, demand will continue to grow, however, the lower economic growth will alter patterns.

Assignees will be looking for increased flexibility and value in their accommodation solutions as organisations issue more short-term contracts when looking to plug skills gaps and contain costs. PWC's *Talent and Mobility: 2020 and Beyond* report shows 20 per cent of assignments now last less than 12 months, compared with 10 per cent in 2002. The options for short- and long-term stays make serviced apartments a desirable model.

The strongest growth in this region will be seen in China, India and Indonesia.

India, as an example, is experiencing the highest growth rate in business travel in the entire world. This is further supported by GBTA's *Annual Global Report and Forecast*, which shows India had US\$26 billion in business travel spending in 2014, and it will grow by a compound annual growth rate of 11.5 per cent through 2019 to US\$45 billion.

**Product** What will be most in demand is expertise: an accommodation solutions partner that has access to a broad portfolio of accommodations, both for short- and long-term stays and that has the experience to deliver cost-effective solutions with a 24/7 team on the ground.

So over the past 12 months Oakwood Worldwide has, for example, introduced a hotel desk and partnered Abacus Hotel and Abacus RoomDeal to access real-time room availability, rates and instant booking confirmation. Alongside that, we continued to grow our network of supply chain partners in Asia-Pacific, so that we can provide additional accommodation solutions in Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities where demand for serviced apartments often outstrip supply.

This increase provides access to more than 400 properties across Asia-Pacific, 28 of which are Oakwood Worldwide-branded properties in key destinations throughout the region, offering 3,800 units in total.

**Expansion** Oakwood Worldwide plans to double its branded portfolio of 28 properties over the next three to five years. We have a pipeline of 14 properties in Asia-Pacific currently. With our joint venture with Mapletree, we expect additional acquisition and development deals.



**Choe Peng Sum, CEO,**  
Frasers Hospitality

**Demand** Despite lower economic growth projections, we expect a sustained demand for serviced apartments as they offer a good value proposition for all types of travellers. The sector has proven to be resilient and it is against a backdrop of austerity measures when the advantages of serviced

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apartments really come to the fore.

Curbs on extravagant spending have actually created demand, which offer the win-win situation of flexible leases and are equipped with everything necessary to help residents and their families settle in.

We expect Australia to still do very well, given that the weaker Australian dollar will attract more tourists to the country.

While China's GDP is slowing down, the absolute growth of six to seven per cent is still significant. Besides, the China story lies with increasing domestic demand, aspirations and rising consumption.

The 10 ASEAN nations continued to receive growing numbers of Chinese travellers in 2015, but the big story was the growth in intra-ASEAN travel. ASEAN collectively is home to more than 600 million people with significant combined GDP. Countries with stronger economies at the moment, including Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, registered strong economic growth last year, and their growing middle classes were using their rising disposable income for domestic or regional travel at previously unseen levels. Frontier markets including Myanmar, Laos and especially Cambodia continue to join the regional tourism landscape with the opening of new roads, airports and hotels. Furthermore, the launch of the ASEAN Economic Community, removing barriers on the flow of people, goods and capital across the block, will boost business and demand.

**Product** The future product has to be more than just a luxury apartment. Millennials and e-generation travellers are expected to grow in force. They don't just look for the traditional hardware (rooms, furniture, fittings, etc), nor the traditional software (services, butler, concierge, etc), but value e-check-ins, e-concierge, and unique lifestyle experiences. Herein lies the opportunity to bridge the gap between hotels and serviced apartments and provide unconventional lifestyle offerings such as our Spin & Play integrated launderette games rooms and personalised cycling tours with the general manager at Capri by Fraser, Changi City Singapore.

**Expansion** Last year was exciting for us. We grew across several key areas, adding more than 3,500 units to our global portfolio, which stands at 136 properties (including pipeline) with over 22,000 units. Highlights last year included new market entries (Capri by Fraser in Barcelona and Frankfurt) and the acquisition of the Malmaison Hotel du Vin group, which doubled our Europe portfolio.

2016 will continue to be a year of expansion, particularly in China and Europe, particularly in high-growth cities with strong foreign direct investment potential. We are capitalising on a window of opportunity now as prices would naturally increase as the economy picks up.

Our objective is to expand our global presence and have 30,000 units by 2019.



**Lee Chee Koon, CEO, The Ascott Limited**

**Demand** We foresee a strong demand for quality serviced residences in key global gateway cities and regional cities in Singapore, China, Australia, as well as capital cities in Asia, Europe and the US.

Domestic demand for serviced residences is rising in China, driven by the fast growing number of corporate and

leisure travellers and rapid urbanisation of Chinese cities. We are accelerating our expansion across Tier 1 and 2 cities, increasing our business development in the growth cities of central and western China, and reaching out to a wider group of travellers by creating O2O (Offline-to-Online and Online-to-Offline) experience for our guests through various partnerships. Last year, we invested in Tujia.com International, China's largest and fastest growing online apartment sharing platform, allowing us to expand our reach to more customers online. Since August 2015, we have also listed our China properties on Alibaba's online travel service platform, Alitrip, to tap on the more than 100 million Chinese travellers it serves.

South-east Asia is also one of the most vibrant markets, with a young population driving domestic demand, growing export figures and various economic policies in place to attract foreign capital. The ASEAN Economic Community will boost its competitiveness and connectivity, increase business activities and foreign direct investment, driving demand for serviced residences.

Japan has been an equally attractive destination for corporate and leisure travellers given the weak yen, eased visa requirements and the proliferation of low-cost carriers, coupled with the implementation of pro-business policies and designation of special economic zones.

**Product** As travellers are increasingly tech-savvy and connected, the customer experience must evolve with their lifestyles. Last year, we forged an exclusive partnership with Samsung Asia to develop smart solutions customised for serviced residences. Guests will be able to use their mobile or wearable devices to control devices such as washing machines, refrigerators and smart TVs. We aim to testbed the technologies at selected Ascott serviced residences by 2H2016, with plans for a global roll-out in phases.

Ascott will continue to focus on providing personalised services. We launched the Ascott Lifestyle programme last year, offering guests bespoke cultural, gastronomic, local and wellness experiences. To help guests settle in a new city, there are local language classes and guided tours of the local market. Guests can stay fit by exploring the area with our customised jogging routes. There are also cultural programmes such as batik making workshops and personal cooking sessions in their apartment.

**Expansion** We added 37 properties (over 6,500 units) last year, reaching our global target of 40,000 units ahead of schedule. We are well on track to reach 80,000 units by 2020. We will continue to grow through management contracts, investments, strategic alliances and franchises.

Last year, we opened in cities such as Hong Kong, Macau, Shanghai and Wuxi in China; Surabaya in Indonesia; Tokyo in Japan, Busan in South Korea; Cyberjaya and Nusajaya in Malaysia; Si Racha in Thailand; Hai Phong in Vietnam and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. This year, we plan to open over 20 properties with more than 4,500 units, the bulk of which is in China, and the rest in South Korea, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Ascott's US\$600 million serviced residence global fund with Qatar Investment Authority, which will focus on Asia-Pacific and Europe initially, will provide Ascott



with the financial boost for acquisitions. In November 2015, tapping on this fund, we acquired two prime properties in Paris and Tokyo.



**Marc Hediger, CEO, Lanson Place Hospitality Management**

**Demand** Despite the regional economic

growth softening during the past six months, there remains a strong demand for serviced apartments in certain cities particularly within the Tier 1.5 and 2 cities in China (Shenzhen, Chengdu, Dalian, Hangzhou, Suzhou) and for some key South-east Asian destinations such as Singapore, Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila.

Within these markets trends are changing. Tenancies are being shortened, with middle management being posted on more temporary assignments and MNCs relocating their administrative offices to cheaper decentralised CBD locations. Yet certain cities also suffer badly from congestion, so high net worth individuals seek a mid-week solution for a second home within their own domestic markets, where serviced apartments have been the ideal choice to cater for this, predominantly in mixed-use developments providing for every requirement.

We have also seen a shift in the resident demographics throughout all the properties in Asia-Pacific. With advanced technology, the millennials are signing shorter-term tenancies, wanting to do business faster and more efficiently. We see baby boomers and gen-X residing without families or younger families seeking smaller and more versatile units.

More significantly, residents who have been educated abroad are coming back to their own countries and relocating from within Asia-Pacific. In China, corporates are expanding their companies to Tier 2 and 3 cities yet still seek a comfortable but affordable lifestyle for their employees.

**Product** We've introduced a third business model, Serviced Suites by Lanson Place, to address the changing trends and needs of corporates relocating. This lean, efficient and contemporary serviced apartment style not only provides a higher ROI for developers but most importantly offers residents a 'niche lifestyle', no matter the location or purpose of their residency.

Smaller units are creatively designed with unique combined open living and working spaces; public areas are the extension of their homes offering seamless connectivity throughout the entire development; 'grab n go' F&B concepts and resident activities all promote well-being and more energising activities.

**Expansion** This year, the majority of our pipeline is for the upscale Serviced Suites by Lanson Place, within either secondary locations in key gateway cities or Tier 1.5 cities in China and South-east Asia. There

will be a further two properties opening this year in Shanghai alongside another three new properties in Asia-Pacific.

With Japan and Australia being not only favoured due to currency investment, but also Chinese travellers where Lanson Place hold a strong reputable market position, there are a lot of opportunities now. Markets such as Jakarta, Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong remain a strategic focus for Lanson Place. Here, we also see opportunity to expand our Boutique Hotel model.

With predictions of a more cautious 2016 ahead for speculative investments, and distressed properties, developers are seeking alternative solutions to hold on to their real estate assets until the time is right for them to sell, considering this slowdown could be longer than anticipated. Investment funds and arms also seem to be able to capitalise on these circumstances. Introducing a serviced apartment component within this environment will help market the property as an exciting destination while taking in some returns until the economy strengthens.



**Bernold Schroeder, CEO, Pan Pacific Hotels Group**

**Demand** Softer demand is expected in

South-east Asia, especially in developed cities like Singapore, due to an increase in supply and a decline in corporate travel as companies cut back on relocation and accommodation expenses. We also cannot underestimate alternative accommodation providers such as Airbnb, which are competing for a slice of the long-stay pie.

Demand in markets such as China and India is expected to be more stable due to slightly higher barriers to entry and a lack of alternative accommodation. In China, Pan Pacific enjoys a strong brand presence and familiarity with our properties in the key cities of Tianjin, Xiamen and Ningbo, and we are expecting moderately strong growth in these cities. The co-existence of a hotel in the vicinity of the serviced suites allows us to offer additional services and comforts which allows us to sustain a longer stay at the latter.

**Product** The compact apartment, such as the one-bedroom, will be most in demand. But while the units may have shrunk in size, traveller expectations have not; they continue to look for serviced suites with facilities such as a well-equipped gym and other conveniences. More corporate travellers and businessmen are travelling without their family while on work assignments (which are also getting shorter due to tighter budgets). Socio-economic trends such as the rise in dual-income families where both spouses are working are contributing factors to more travellers embarking on work trips without their family.

**Expansion** The hybrid model of hotels



# Special report Serviced residences

and serviced apartments we are operating under our Pan Pacific brand in China has given us a good niche and the opportunity to convert hotel to long-term stays at our serviced suites, which helps us grow organically.

At the same time, we are constantly on the look-out for new opportunities and projects. In 2015, we renovated Parkroyal Yangon and converted a number of hotel rooms into serviced suites to meet demand. In the same year, we announced the planned opening of Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Puteri Harbour in Johor, Malaysia, which will be ready by 2018. Located in Iskandar, it will be the first serviced suites we are operating under the Pan Pacific brand in Malaysia, and is strategically close to medical and healthcare services, educational institutions and entertainment facilities.



**Arthur Kiong, CEO, Far East Hospitality, Singapore**

**Demand** We expect occupancy and rate to be flat. This year,

Singapore is expecting modest economic growth of between two and 2.5 per cent. As a developed economy, this is the new normal. The issue we're looking at is really new supply. Direct competition from new entrants as well as indirect competition from Airbnb will also affect supply.

Demand for serviced apartments has grown in the last 10 years, and has reached a matured level. In Singapore, serviced apartment occupancy has exceeded that of hotels from 2010 to 2012. This trend can also be seen in Hong Kong, Sydney and London.

But even with the projected lower economic growth for the region, serviced apartments continue to appeal to savvy corporate and leisure travellers who see value in serviced apartments as a viable alternative to hotels or renting private apartments.

Serviced apartments demand is closely linked to industries that rely on foreign talent who require mid to long-term accommodation due to the nature of their projects. These industries include financial services, engineering and IT.

**Product** With a moderate business outlook, companies will be more likely to curb spending in relocation and employee mobility, increasing the trend of shorter home search durations as opposed to relocating an entire family. We thus foresee stronger demand for smaller sized apartments such as studios and one-bedrooms.

Within the serviced apartment seg-

ment, Far East Hospitality will continue to leverage our advantage in prime locations. This market segment is complementary to our hotels.

**Expansion** Oasia would be expanding locally and abroad, with three strategically located hotels and serviced residences to open in Singapore and Malaysia next year, adding over 700 rooms to our growing portfolio. This expansion comes at an opportune time as the region continues to mature and we believe the brand's clear focus on health and well-being will resonate with our business and leisure guests.

Specifically to the serviced residence offering, we will be opening the Oasia Residence, Singapore in 4Q16. Located in the West Coast, and within close proximity to the business parks and education institutions in the area, Oasia Residence, Singapore will be well-suited to capture the growing business traveller market and meet the rising demand for serviced residences in the west, where the current supply is relatively low.



**Peter Henley, CEO, Onyx Hospitality Group**

**Demand** Across our regional portfolio of 37 properties, 17 are

either serviced residences or residential-style properties. We do not anticipate a softening in demand. On contrary, we are seeing a noticeable shift from more corporate-heavy demand to an increasingly growing leisure clientele choosing to stay with us. Benefits like additional space, residence-like feel and enhanced in-room facilities appeal to guests, particularly families and couples travelling on holidays. And because many of our properties also offer the added flexibility of full hotel services, the draw becomes even stronger.

**Product** Our residential-style properties tend to perform well, and we are confident there will be growth in the year ahead. This is the reason why eight properties out of our 21-strong pipeline are either serviced residences or hotels with residential facilities. From our pipeline, China holds the strongest potential, both in primary and secondary cities. We also see strong investor interest in Malaysia and India.

**Expansion** Over the next three years, we have eight residential-style properties scheduled to open across the region. These include Amari Residences Pattaya, Shama Daqing Heilongjiang, Shama Pazhou Guangzhou this year; Amari Residences GIFT City in Ahmedabad and



Far East Hospitality Orchard Scotts Residence Suite

Shama Caojiadu Shanghai in 2017; and Shama Medini in Johor Bahru, Shama Tianfu Chengdu and Shama Yangling Beijing in 2018.



**John M Flood, president & CEO, Archipelago International**

**Demand** This will soften in the long-stay

serviced apartments market due to the economic slowdown, and in particular, the slowdown in the oil and gas business.

However this slowdown was predicted by most people in the industry several years ago, so new projects have been designed and fitted out with more of the short-stay market in mind. This market view serviced apartments as a great alternative to a standard hotel room. In most cases guests can get a room or unit the same size as a large hotel suite but for the price of a hotel room. With several bedrooms sometimes included in units, many families or groups of friends prefer to share an apartment rather than several hotel rooms so they have a larger common space where they can gather in.

We expect a five to 10 per cent growth in business this year mostly due to the demand for short stays. The Middle East market continues to grow especially during the hot season when many want to get away to somewhere cooler and less humid.

**Product** Smaller one-bedroom units with a living room (a typical hotel suite) will continue to be most in demand due to the extra space it gives guests.

**Expansion** On average in Indonesia we open about one new hotel every two weeks. About 10 per cent of these hotels are geared towards the serviced apartment market especially in areas where expats need them for long stays, such as Jakarta or Balikpapan, or places in demand by families such as Bali.

Many condotels are larger units as this helps the real estate sales to individual investors. Therefore many of these then become more serviced apartment type developments. Due to the high bank interest

rates in Indonesia, condotels are a much cheaper way of financing a development and moving real estate – something that's obviously attractive to the bigger developers in the region.

We will continue to open about one hotel every two weeks for the next three years and after that we will see a slowdown as the market in many areas becomes saturated and we reach a level of hotels similar to Malaysia or the Philippines. – *Mimi Hudoyo*



**Kem Siew, vice president sales & marketing, Swiss-Garden International**

**Demand** We experienced a 20 per cent year-on-year decline in demand last year compared with 2014. We expect demand in 2016 to be similar with 2015, with bookings coming mainly from Asia.

The strongest markets will be corporate clientele from Asia and leisure, family clientele from Singapore, Indonesia, the Middle East and India. Weak demand can be expected from the oil and gas sectors as well as medium and longhaul corporate clientele.

**Product** Two-bedroom serviced apartments for leisure clients and one-bedroom or studio apartments for corporate clients will be in most demand. Leisure tourists will prefer service apartments within the city centre and close to shopping malls. Corporate clients will want serviced apartments which are close to their workplace.

**Expansion** Swiss-Garden International Hotels, Resorts & Inns manages three new serviced apartments which opened in 2015. Swiss-Garden Resort Residences Kuantan (179 units) and Swiss-Garden Hotel & Residences Malacca (790 units) both opened in January 2015. D'Majestic by Swiss-Garden, Kuala Lumpur opened on July 1 with 188 units. This year we opened the 205-key Swiss Inn Johor Bahru on January 16. We are looking at opening a serviced residence in Cameron Highlands and at Genting Highlands in the next five years. – *S Puvanewary*

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Diethelm Travel Group, an award-winning inbound tour operator servicing Asia, released a collection of highlighted new product offerings for incredible travel experience available in 2016. Designed to showcase the best destinations and tours in each of the countries, the innovative offerings provide discerning travellers with true journeys of a lifetime.

Available in Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, Diethelm Travel programmes range from afternoon excursions focusing on a specific aspect of local culture or attraction, to multi-day explorations that allow travellers to fully experience all a region has to offer. From learning traditional customs and crafts from talented artisans, to even staying in locals' homes, the new products help show a side of Asia few travellers have seen before.

"Diethelm Travel has always focused on providing exceptional experiences but our 2016 product offerings feature even more exclusive adventures specifically designed to connect travellers with not simply the destinations, but the people and cultures they're visiting," says Lisa Fitzell, Group Managing Director of Diethelm Travel Group. "Not only will guests appreciate the wide selection of unique excursions and activities - just imagine learning how to weave with local weavers in Luang Prabang or venturing to the remote lands of the Naga tribe in Myanmar - but ability of each experience to reveal a deeper layer of a place and its people."

While Diethelm Travel has long been known for its extensive line of offerings and services geared toward both corporate and leisure travellers, the 2016 offerings take Asia travel to the next level for both clients and guests.

## ONLINE BOOKING XML/API CONNECTIVITY

Along with its unique tours, Diethelm Travel is a leader in the industry with its proprietary internet booking system which provides clients unparalleled access to streamlined booking capabilities for hotels, transfers, excursions and packages, as well as a wide range of real-time data and actionable business insights. The new online platform will operate across 5 countries and increase to 12 by the end of 2016.

"The booking system will revolutionize the way both we and our B2B clients do business," said Lisa Fitzell, Group Managing Director of Diethelm Travel Group. "As the travel industry continues to move into the online world and use big data to its advantage, Diethelm Travel Group will be at the forefront of pursuing technology that enables us to provide exceptional service."



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JOURNEYS OF A LIFETIME



## News/Snapshots

# First Thai halal hotel eyes Europe

Al Meroz Bangkok woos buyers from European countries with large Muslim communities

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

RECOGNISING the immense potential of a market of 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide, the new 242-room Al Meroz Hotel, which soft-opened in Bangkok's predominantly Muslim enclave of Ramkhamhaeng last November, has initiated efforts to establish its presence at this year's ITB Berlin to get travel agents in Europe acquainted with Thailand's first halal property.

"Our target markets are Muslims living in France, Germany and Scandinavia – European countries with significant Muslim communities – as well as Austria and Eastern European

countries like Serbia," said Sanya Saengboon, managing director & general manager of Al Meroz Hotel.

He said that despite the impressive growth figures involved with the lucrative Muslim travel market, European travel agents had yet to show an eagerness for this niche sector. "I expect Europe's Muslim outbound market to grow, especially to South-east Asia, as the region is still perceived as an exotic destination," he added.

The attention on Europe's Islamic population is also part of

the four-star property's strategy to diversify its current Muslim market sources of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and domestic travellers from Southern Thailand, Sanya told the *Daily*. Muslim guests currently make up 50 per cent of the hotel's clientele.

Apart from ITB Berlin, Al Meroz Hotel will also be attending global travel trade shows such as the Arabian Travel Market and World Travel Market this year. Plans to conduct roadshows to the Central Asian nations of Ka-

zakhstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan are in the pipeline as well.

The hotel is certified Muslim-friendly hospitality provider by the UAE's Gulf Halal Center. It offers halal restaurants, a women-only floor, separate prayer rooms and a rooftop swimming pool open at different timings for male and female guests. A copy of the Quran, *qibla* (direction to Mecca), prayer times and mat are also available in the rooms and suites.

Owned by the Thai-Muslim TS Family Group, the halal-friendly environment is part of Al Meroz Hotel's values and not simply a business decision, said

Sanya. A dry hotel is as lively as any other, he insisted, when questioned on the hotel's alcohol-free policy.

And despite its halal-friendly label, Al Meroz Hotel is able to cater to non-Muslims as well. "We have a good mix of corporate and leisure tourists from Thailand and overseas. Our first few guests are from the non-Muslim Western world and we had many non-Muslim groups from China during the (recent) Lunar New Year period (in February)," commented Sanya.

A grand opening for Al Meroz Hotel has been scheduled for July 2016.



Sanya: a dry hotel is as lively as any other

## Clink, clink, another drink at Hotel Berlin

PATA, together with ETOA and IGLTA, gathers the trade for a merry evening. Photos by Eugene Tang



HotelPlanner US' Britta Roberts, Steigenberger Hotel Group Germany's Daniela Ohlsen and Marcus Cameroni, and Best Western Hotels Central Europe Germany's Sabine Lüttge



Bank of Ireland's Gerardo Larios Rizo, Tripadvisor UK's Helena Egan and British Hospitality Association's Ufi Ibrahim



TTG Asia Media Singapore's Darren Ng, PATA Thailand's Kevin Murphy, European Tourism Association (ETOA) UK's Tom Jenkins, PATA UK's Daniela Wagner, PATA Thailand's Mario Hardy and International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association US' Clark Massad



PATA Thailand's Kevin Murphy, and TTG Asia Media Singapore's Raini Hamdi and Darren Ng



HotelPlanner US' Aria Taddey, CBN Travel & MICE China's Adam Wu and HotelPlanner US' Aioni Ortiz



International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association US' Clark Massad and RSI Group Italy's Linda McLaren



ETOA UK's Jay Munro-Michell, Geco Hotels Italy's Valentina Leone and Gestioni Consulenze Alberghiere Italy's Marco Zanella



PATA Sweden Chapter's Robert Hallin, Lena Skogström and Lena Flodin, PATA Finland Chapter's Marco Simonen, PATA Thailand's Halona Padiachy and PATA Finland Chapter's Hanna-Leena Halsas



A-rosa Flussschiff Germany's Lucia Rowe and CorePlaceCapital UK's Simon Powell



Diversity Tourism Germany Thomas Bömkes and Hans Schmidl



Gate1Travel UK's Kevin Root and Regensburg Tourismus' Michael Vogl





# WELCOME TO AL MEROZ THE LEADING HALAL HOTEL IN BANGKOK

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The AL Meroz Hotel is conveniently located with easy access to Suvarnabhumi Airport and downtown Bangkok. The Hotel's accommodation, dining and leisure facilities have been specially created to ensure the comfort and wellbeing of our Muslim and non-Muslim guests. All meals in our restaurants are Halal-certified and the Hotel is a non-alcoholic. Our staff are respectfully trained and attired in the Muslim tradition, while retaining the warmth and hospitality for which Thailand is renowned.

4, Ramkhamhaeng Soi 5, Ramkhamhaeng Road, Suan Luang, Bangkok 10250, Thailand.

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