

TTG Show Daily



Issue

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March 11, 2016



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DER streamlines post-Kuoni buy

DER to expand own DMC network, new JV with Buffalo Tours creates Go Vacation Vietnam

By Raini Hamdi

HAVING bought the entire Kuoni European tour operating business, DER Touristik Group is streamlining processes in a way that won't affect the customer-facing side but will have trade implications on issues such as contracting and ground-handling.

Already, Asian Trails has lost the Kuoni Switzerland, Scandinavia and the UK accounts to Go Vacation Thailand and Indonesia, the DMC owned by DER. Asian Trails continues to handle Kuoni clients from the three source markets in areas where Go Vacation is not represented, such as Malaysia, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos.

But with more volume – the acquisition makes DER a leading pan-European travel company with some 7.7 million customers from source markets like Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Great Britain, Scandinavia, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary – DER is looking to expand its DMC footprint in countries it operates in that are using third-party DMCs, said DER Touristik CEO Central Europe Rene Herzog in an interview with the *Daily*.

This could be via Go Vacation, joint



Herzog: harmonising many things over the next 12 months

ventures with other companies or founding new companies. It announced yesterday a joint venture with Buffalo Tours to create Go Vacation Vietnam. The new partnership will welcome its first guests from November 1.

"The DMC is an important part of the value chain. Whenever we have the size, it makes sense to be in control of the quality and value creation," said Herzog.

DER at the same time is streamlining its Frankfurt office which handles

brands DERTOUR, Meier's Weltreisen and ADAC, and Cologne office (ITS and Jahn Reisen). All these brands, including Kuoni, will eventually be on one IT infrastructure. Corporate-wise, Herzog's namecard already carries all the brands, including Kuoni, and "it is possible over time the name (DER) will change but the brands will remain; customer-facing activities remain exactly as they are", he said.

"It's the behind-the-scenes aspects like data-entering, IT, brochure production, etc, that we are harmonising, areas that customers don't see. We have bought the rights to the Kuoni brand for 50 years. In the UK and Switzerland the brand is strong, why should we change it?" said Herzog.

Asked about the impact of Kuoni Group's sale to EQT, Herzog admitted it was "frustrating".

"There's so much negative press coverage surrounding the Kuoni Group in Switzerland and customers do not always understand that Kuoni Reisen is not part of Kuoni Group anymore. Right now, because of the negative news, a customer passes a Kuoni agency in Switzerland and thinks it's going bankrupt because of all

the negative press. It's not. It's a different Kuoni but how do we tell him that? We're not going to be putting stickers on the Kuoni brand saying this now belongs to DER," said Herzog.

He expects the issue to be resolved once Kuoni is privatised.

Asked why Kuoni was a good buy, he said: "It has great brands, great market position, an existing customer base, very professional people and it is not over-priced."

Meanwhile, Asian Trails' CEO Laurent Kuenzle said the company was prepared that the Kuoni accounts would go to Go Vacation, saying this was "the logical conclusion" since DER owns the DMC.

On impact to the business, he said Asian Trails was not dependent on any one source, handling more than 350,000 passengers a year from around the world.

"This also opens a new opportunity for us to work with other partners which couldn't work with us due to our association with Kuoni, which they deemed a competitor," he added.

But he admitted on the emotional level, it was sad to lose the accounts. "Some of them were our launch customers," he said.

Asia to do well due to safe image, say operators

By Raini Hamdi

GERMAN tour operators interviewed said Asia would do well this year, citing its safe image overall as one of the reasons for this assessment.

Safety has become the major influencer in German consumers' travel decision-making process after the recent terror attacks, ongoing conflicts and the refugee crisis that are affecting travel to destinations such as Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia and Greece, according to tour operators.

"These are difficult days and it's a huge problem to sell the African part of the Mediterranean," said DER Touristik Frankfurt managing director, Matthias Rotter.

"Fortunately DERTOUR and Meier's have a big portfolio of destinations and we're able to compensate for a loss in one with a gain in another," he said.

Rotter expects longhaul business to remain steady with a light increase to Asia and a larger one to South Africa due to pent-up demand after the Ebola crisis a few years ago. In Asia, Sri Lanka is doing "extremely well" for DER, as is Japan – again due to pent-up demand following the Fukushima tragedy. Thailand and the

Philippines are at the same level as last year. "Sri Lanka contracts in euro, whereas the Thai baht's link to the US dollar has caused a 15 per cent increase in rates due to the strengthening of the US dollar against the euro," Rotter pointed out. But he said suppliers in Thailand had been co-operative in not raising rates.

Marco Polo Reisen's managing director Holger Baldus also said there were no major price increases in traditional destinations in Asia like Thailand, but what was more attractive to Germans was not pricing but that Asia was seen as safe. "The red and yellow shirts, Er-awan bombing, etc, are all but forgotten now. People are travelling to where they feel it is safe. Price comes second," he said.

For Marco Polo Reisen, Indochina, India and China are "back on track" after a decline of 12 per cent, nine per cent and 26 per cent respectively last year. But the real star is Japan, which rose a whopping 73 per cent last year.

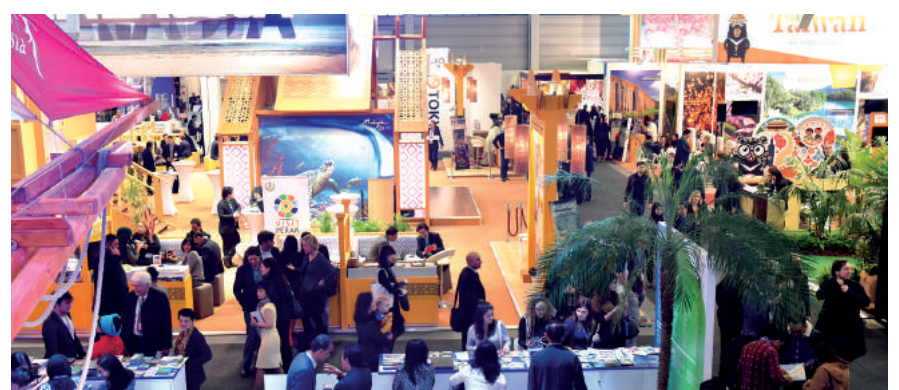
"We expect a bit more growth this year, after last year's substantial one. That's more than 1,000 guests to Japan. For its



Rotter: big portfolio a blessing



Lauff: safety-aware German consumers



Brisk selling taking place in Hall 25 and 26 where Asia is

high prices that's a lot of guests. Again, it's not about pricing. Japan is seen as safe," said Baldus.

He added: "Asia is looking good...In the end, Germans will continue to travel. Our economy is doing well. It's a question of where and business is being re-divided according to safety perceptions."

Thomas Cook Touristik product manager Asia, Arabia and Indian Ocean, Jens-Jochen Lauff, agreed: "The clients are never more concerned about safety and security than now. The reservations people are getting

the question, 'Is it safe to go?' all the time. Clients are now very aware of (hazards) be it a virus or terror. This is especially so for families than couples. So the travel agent has quite a lot of influence in helping clients decide where to go. If they say Bali is safe, it can influence the clients to go," said Lauff.

Bali, Thailand and Vietnam are all doing well for Thomas Cook. The Maldives however is down, with Lauff saying there is a shift from the Maldives, which contracts in US dollar, to Mauritius, which contracts in euro. On top of that, he said, Maldives' high-end hotels were over-pricing themselves.

News

ASEAN plans for the big 50

SE Asia's NTOs set into motion the wheels of a regional destination campaign

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena and Paige Lee Pei Qi

AS the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) gears up to commemorate its 50th anniversary in 2017, top tourism officials have come together to lay the groundwork for a new campaign and build up the momentum to promote the region as a single tourism destination.

The *Visit ASEAN@50: Golden Celebration* campaign will highlight the region's top 50 festivals and 50 travel experiences, in addition to launching special themed offers and travel promotions on the website.

Speaking to the *Daily* at the official pre-launch of the campaign yesterday, Malaysia's minister of tourism and culture, Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, said the campaign would be a formal endorsement of tour operators' on-going efforts in selling multi-country packages.

"In the past, each operator has been (marketing these packages) on his own, and now he will get support from ASEAN. It will not be done haphazardly, it will be done properly with the support of ASEAN," he said.

Packages will be devised based on themes; a consolidated heritage tour, for instance, will leverage UNESCO World Heritage sites in ASEAN.

Thailand, on its part, has already initiated efforts in promot-



South-east Asia's top tourism officials link hands at the pre-launch of the *Visit ASEAN @ 50: Golden Celebration* campaign

ing dual-country packages under its ASEAN Connect project since last year, according to Thai minister of tourism and sports Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul.

However, improving connectivity will be a core aim for ASEAN in its quest to roll out "realistic packages", admits Kobkarn. She added: "We have improved land connectivity to neighbouring countries, enabling the roll-out of packages such as Trat by road to Sihanoukville and onward to Siem Reap, or Trat-Sihanoukville-Phu Quoc."

Recognising the importance of trade partners, Thai tourism authorities have also linked arms with Bangkok Airways to improve air connectivity between Thailand and neighbouring countries.

"Airlines need to help us," said Kobkarn. "We want to improve connectivity not just between capital cities, we also want to connect tier two to tier two cities, tier three to tier three cities, etc."

Singapore Tourism Board director of trade engagement & market access, international group, Soo Siew Keong, agreed: "The main driver of this (campaign) is to work with the trade to see what is appealing to the travellers and involve them."

"We want to bring in airlines from longhaul markets into the ASEAN countries. We also have an interest in cruise and hotel chains too. They can all come together to form an attractive package," he added.

For instance, visitors can

fly into ASEAN by Singapore Airlines, then fly around the region on AirAsia and stay in a hotel chain across the ASEAN countries and this can all be packed into a package. The trade forms a very important role to allow this campaign to roll," he said.

However, the absence of a single visa for the region continues to be a bugbear for visitors, especially for those hailing outside of South-east Asia.

Mohamed Nazri believes the campaign will "motivate" member countries to ease their visa requirements if they see the success of its neighbours in attracting higher visitor numbers owing to liberal visa policies.

During the campaign pre-launch yesterday, So Mara, sec-

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retary of state at the Ministry of Tourism Cambodia said the campaign aimed for 121 million visitor arrivals to ASEAN by 2017, an increase in tourism receipts to US\$83 billion and a longer average length of stay of six-seven days and to more than two ASEAN countries. — See pre-launch pictures on page 22

HG Travel branches out into Thailand and Myanmar

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

TRAVEL industry veterans and destination specialists Andre van der Marck and Mika Itävaara have come together to establish new offices in Thailand and Myanmar under HG Travel, a Hanoi-based DMC with existing offices in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

"The joint venture came at the right time," said HG Travel Thailand managing director Andre van der Marck, formerly vice president of Khiri Travel.

HG Travel Thailand is expected to start operations in April 2016, and will initially boast a team of five in Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

HG Travel Myanmar managing director Mika Itävaara, meanwhile, leads the Indochina-focused DMC's expansion into Myanmar with the merger of Discovery DMC, a boutique tour company where he was owner and CEO. The Yangon-based office began operations late last



Itävaara and van der Marck: a focus on personalised experiences

year with 13 staff.

The business model of HG Travel is strictly B2B, and van der Marck and Itävaara will focus on building the US and European outbound markets into Thailand and Myanmar.

Said van der Marck: "We will fill the gap for personalised, middle size and high touch segment

(in both countries), led by a general manager who has been (in the destination) for ages. We will offer customised tours with destination experts."

As Thailand and Indochina remain popular destinations, the region's highly competitive DMC industry still has room for more players, commented van der Marck.

"With over 25 million arrivals to Thailand, I just need 0.01 per cent of the market. There's something for everyone," he added.

Itävaara sees untapped potential in northern Europe and will tap his Finnish background and industry links to grow the long-haul market for HG Travel Myanmar.

"The Scandinavian market is only coming in a small trickle into Myanmar. With Emirates' new daily service (linking Dubai and Yangon from August 3), Yangon will be a nice hub and travellers can fly out of Bangkok or Phuket."

Buyers ignore travel advisories against Sabah

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

DESPITE the recent advisories raised against travel to coastal islands in Sabah, it is business as usual as far as buyers are concerned.

In spite of the travel warnings, Julien Ernst, director of group & special interest travel at Switzerland-based Tourasia, said he was aware that the ground situation is safe and will hence continue to sell the destination while assuring his clients at the same time. "We have seen growing interest into the whole of Borneo because the Swiss like to experience nature-based tourism, and Borneo offers wildlife, rainforests and beaches, which are very popular among the Swiss," he said.

Likewise, Walter Tretenhahn, managing director of Austria-based Eastlink Travel Service & Consulting, said clients were "not too affected" by the advisories.

However, Disney Jaboh, sales development executive of Bor-

neo Adventure, expressed more caution. While he has yet to receive any cancellations, he said: "There will definitely be more questions (while) issues like insurance coverage may affect their decision."



Jaboh: communication essential

With more than half of Borneo Adventure's business driven by the European market, he said: "We are all in touch with our agents in Europe to let them know that the situation is not as severe as the travel notices make it out to be."

Earlier last month, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office issued a travel advisory that raised the terrorism threat level for the islands off Sabah from 'general' to 'high'. The advisory warned "against all but essential travel to all islands off the coast of eastern Sabah from Kudat to Tawau, including (but not limited to) Lankayan, Mabul, Pom Pom, Kapalai, Ligitan, Sipadan and Matakong".

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Best Local Hotel Chain

News/Snapshots

Bintan Lagoon seeks creative developers

Five-year plan to transform land into various niche hotels

By Paige Lee Pei Qi
BINTAN Lagoon Resort (BLR) is on the hunt for partners to participate in its next phase of development which will see it grow from the current 500 rooms to 2,500 rooms in various thematic properties.
As part of BLR's 20th anniversary this July, president director of BLR, Moe Ibrahim, said the resort, which currently owns 283ha of land, intends to work with partners to transform the whole area into a "massive marketplace" under a five-year plan.
"We are talking about transforming the place into a variety of boutique resorts, and in a way that has never been done before," said Moe.
The land could be divided, for instance, into various 200-room properties featuring their own unique themes such as sports, wellness and medical tourism, he said.
"We want to build demand

for tourists based on (the consumer's) interest (in each project) in its own right, and not let each one be controlled so much by the economic cycle," said Moe.
"We want to replace what is dated with a new concept. We no longer want to be just a 500-



Moe: massive transformation of BLR

room resort; instead we want to go out with a specific and tailored message to the market," he added.
The initiative will also see an overhaul of F&B concepts at the current resort which alone offers 12 dining options.
As the expansion plan is still in planning stages, Moe said relevant themes based on market demand were continuing to be assessed. For now, BLR's current goal is to find partners to help execute this project.
Moe estimates the "massive transformative project" to cost about S\$300 million (US\$217 million).
He expects the development to raise Bintan's appeal and fuel greater interest on the island from the international market.
Currently, more than 50 per cent of tourists to the resort arrive from Singapore.

We are talking about transforming the place into a variety of boutique resorts and in a way that's never been done before.

Moe Ibrahim
President director, BLR

PG to grow Europe traffic with more codeshares

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena
BANGKOK Airways intends to widen its codeshare partnerships, a move that is expected to bring an additional 1.2 million seats through the three key gateways of Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.
Jirapon Hirunrat, vice president-network management at Bangkok Airways, told the *Daily* the plan was "to cover the most of the EU zone and utilise (partner carriers') marketing tools".
Another key strategy is "to focus on interline traffic through all international gateways to Thailand".
In the pipeline are codeshare partnerships with one European and seven Asian airlines.
The smallest but best-performing carrier among Thailand's publicly traded airlines, Bangkok Airways has been swiftly expanding its portfolio of codeshare partners in its bid to grow the European outbound and longhaul traffic to its Bangkok hub.
"Airline partnerships, either codesharing or other cooperative arrangements, have become powerful tools for expanding networks, enhancing revenue

and reducing costs," said Jirapon.
The use of codeshare partnerships had yielded a growth of nearly 13-17 per cent annually for the past three years for Bangkok Airways, he added.
Among its codesharing agreements with 20 airlines, British Airways is showing "significant traffic growth" while Emirates generates "significant revenue proportion".
The independent full-service regional carrier is also planning further expansion, as it expects to receive three ATR72-600s and three to four Airbus A319s, bringing its total inventory to 36 aircraft this year.
This year, the company will introduce three new routes, namely, Chiang Mai-Mae Hong Son, Bangkok-Danang (Vietnam) and Samui-Guangzhou (China).
It will also upgrade frequencies on popular sectors. On the cards are Bangkok-Phnom Penh (five to six daily flights), Bangkok-Chiang Mai (seven to eight daily flights), Chiang Mai-Samui (once to twice daily during high season) and Samui-Singapore (double daily).

Asia's charm offensive in full force **By Eugene Tang**



Ministry of Tourism, Republic of Indonesia's Nia Niscaya (third from left) supported by her team



Sol Beach House Benoa Bali's Alvaro Berton Rodriguez, Melia Hotels International Indonesia's Sharon Lee, Melia Bali Indonesia's Wayan Suwastana and Melia Purosani Indonesia's Manuel Quiros



Buddha Air Nepal's Jibesh Basnet and Parashar Jung Pandey



Al Meroz Hotel Bangkok's Sanya Saengboon



Cathay Pacific UK's Neil Glenn and Cathay Pacific Germany's Tony Sham



Onyx Hospitality Group UK's June Delaney, and Onyx Hospitality Group Thailand's Debrah Pascoe and Kullapranee Sawareephol



Golden Trip Travels & Tours Myanmar's Khin Maung Myint and Myo Nyunt



Sri Lanka Tourism's Ruwini Dias Bandaranayake, Hettigoda Group Sri Lanka's Asoka Hettigoda and Air Astana Germany's Pradeep Dissanayake



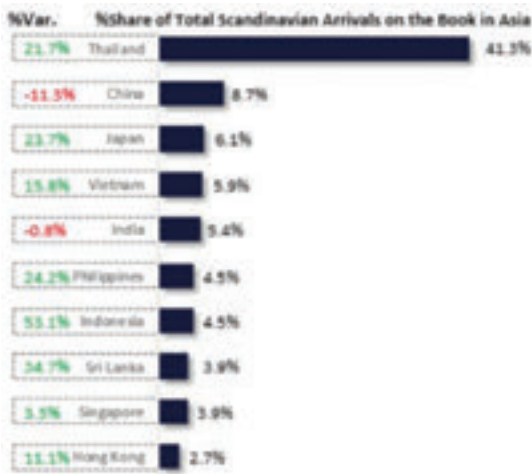
Let's Sea Hua Hin Al Fresco Resort's Sudkhet Pongpitak and Srayut Ekahitanonda

Intelligence

Thailand hottest among Scandinavians

Bangkok's easy access to rest of Asia wins Thailand the favour of Scandinavian holidaymakers, while China's friendlier visa policy may boost arrivals, reports *Forward Keys*

The list of preferred Asian destinations for the Scandinavian market is very similar to that for the German market. The only difference is that Scandinavians tend to prefer the Philippines over the Maldives. Thailand absolutely dominates the market with a lion share of 41.3% in forward bookings for arrivals in 1H2016.



Bangkok is the gateway for Scandinavian travelers to access South-east Asia for leisure. It is connected to the capital cities of three countries with at least one daily flight, 10,000 seats available per week, during the 2015/16 winter season ending in mid-March. Singapore is the only other hub in South-east Asia that has five weekly flights from Copenhagen.

Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Tokyo are other Asian cities that are connected to Scandinavian countries with direct flights.

China's updated visa-free transit policy may bring new products for the Scandinavian market in 1H2016. Starting from end-January 2016, Schengen country citizens can stay up to six days without a visa on direct transits through airports in Shanghai, Nanjing, and Hangzhou. With SAS direct flights between Copenhagen and Shanghai and between

All Direct Flights Between Scandinavian Countries and Asia. 2016H1				
(Single Direction)	Weekly Flights	Weekly Seats	Operating Airlines	Notes
Copenhagen-Beijing	7	1700	SAS	
Copenhagen-Shanghai	7	1700	SAS	
Stockholm - Hong Kong	5	1325	SAS	Started in Sep 2015
Stockholm-Beijing	7	2100	Air China	Starting early June 2016, before 5 flights per week
Copenhagen-Tokyo	7	1700	SAS	Starting late March 2016, before 6 flights per week
Copenhagen-Singapore	5	1400	Singapore Airlines	
Copenhagen-Bangkok	10	3400	SAS/Thai Airways	Until winter peak season ends in mid-March;
Stockholm-Bangkok	9	3100	and Thai Airways	Thai Airways takes over
Oslo-Bangkok	10	3400	Norwegian Air Shuttle	SAS as operating airlines in late March 2016.

Stockholm and Hong Kong, trips combining visits to the Yangtze River Delta in China and Hong Kong may become increasingly popular.

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Special report **Asian outbound**

A lasting favourite

Savings from a weak euro against the Singapore dollar are drawing Singaporean travellers to Europe, while more Thais are diving deeper into the region, encouraged by cheaper flights and additional air connections



Iceland is gaining in popularity among travellers from Singapore; The Blue Lagoon in Reykjavik pictured here



The weakened Euro continues to inspire a wanderlust among Singaporeans, making Europe the top destination in 2015.

Devinder Ohri, president of National Association of Travel Agents Singapore, opined that Europe “continues to be a strong destination (as) its diverse cultures, languages, history, architecture and cuisine inspire visitors to return”.

Alicia Seah, director of marketing communications at Dynasty Travel, said:

“The appetite for Europe has grown by 10 to 15 per cent last year especially due to the favourable exchange rates.”

According to Seah, favoured destinations are Finland, Central Europe and Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, Chan Brothers Travel has witnessed mainstream European destinations leading the trend, with classical destinations France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Scandinavia winning over most Singaporeans. However, the agency’s head of marketing communications, Jane Chang, said Arctic Circle, Iceland, Scotland, England, Austria, Hungary,

Czech Republic, Croatia and Slovenia are beginning to take off, aided by ramped up destination marketing.

Seah believes that the stronger demand for emerging European destinations is also a result of “affluent and well-heeled travellers starting to opt for more unique and exotic destinations”.

She expects Iceland and Croatia be new hot favourites in 2016.

Echoing similar observations, Trafalgar (Asia) president, Nicholas Lim, told the *Daily*: “We found that Spain and Eastern Europe, namely Prague, Budapest, Poland and Croatia, were high on our lists in 2015. From these trends, we are clearly seeing more Singaporean travellers maturing in terms of their destination choices. Many of our travellers are also opting for mono-destinations where they spend more time in one country versus visiting a few over the same number of days.”

Lim added that Singaporean travellers also sought authentic experiences.

“They yearn for local cuisines and interaction with locals besides discovering new sights and sounds,” he said.

While Spain and Eastern Europe look to remain popular in 2016, a recent poll by Trafalgar saw “a few surprises” when Italy, England and Iceland also emerged as preferred destinations.

He commented: “This (supports) the trend that travellers from Singapore are becoming more discerning and savvy. Most are looking for the next frontier in holiday experiences.

“In the past, shopping used to be the main motivator. While it is often part and parcel of any holiday, shopping is no longer a key (factor when travellers decide on) their destination.”



(We) are clearly seeing more Singaporean travellers maturing in terms of their destination choices. Many...are also opting for mono-destinations where they spend more time in one country...

Nicholas Lim
President
Trafalgar (Asia)

According to outbound specialists in the Lion City, the recent terrorist attack on Paris is unlikely to derail the rising interest in Europe.

Lim said: “The impact was temporary and there were almost no cancellations (in the aftermath). Travellers are coming back to us with their 2016 European holiday plans.” – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**



Thai departures for Europe look set to grow by between five and seven per cent in 2016, with established favourites – England, France, Switzerland and Germany – remaining popular among Thai travellers.

Some 800,000 Thais headed to Europe in 2015, a number outbound agents said would grow despite recent economic tribulations such as the depreciation of the Thai baht and stock exchange bumps.

Suparerk Soorangura, president of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, said cheaper airfares and tour packages, as a result of competition from Middle Eastern airlines and falling oil prices, had helped to boost demand for Europe.

Illustrating the price difference, Suparerk said it cost between 80,000 baht (US\$2,232.60) and 100,000 baht to fly to Europe three or four years ago, whereas today the fare is more than halved at about 40,000 baht, thanks to the rise of low-cost carriers that fly longhaul.

A “growing flight offer” would intensify Thai outbound traffic to Europe, said Dirk Grossman, Lufthansa’s general man-

ager for Thailand and the Mekong Region.

Grossman explained that Thailand and Europe were brought closer with four European flights from Thailand to Cologne and additional capacity on Swiss International Air Lines’ flights.

He said: “Since starting a night flight out of Bangkok last December, we have seen an overall increase in leisure groups from Thailand to Europe.”

While the falling cost of airfare might have changed where tourists want to go, the Big Four of Europe – England, France, Germany and Switzerland – still dominate, according to outbound players.

Nuanchan Pientam, chairwoman of NC Tour and Enterprise, said Paris “is a favourite and most well known (of all European destinations) to Thais”. She believes that Thais will continue to favour France in 2016 because they enjoy shopping and dining, and the country is known for all that.

However, Thais are increasingly keen to go deeper into the region, a trend that has benefitted secondary destinations.

Suparerk explained that Thais travelling to France might go on to Nice or Lyon after spending some time in Paris, while those going to London might add Scot-

land to their programme.

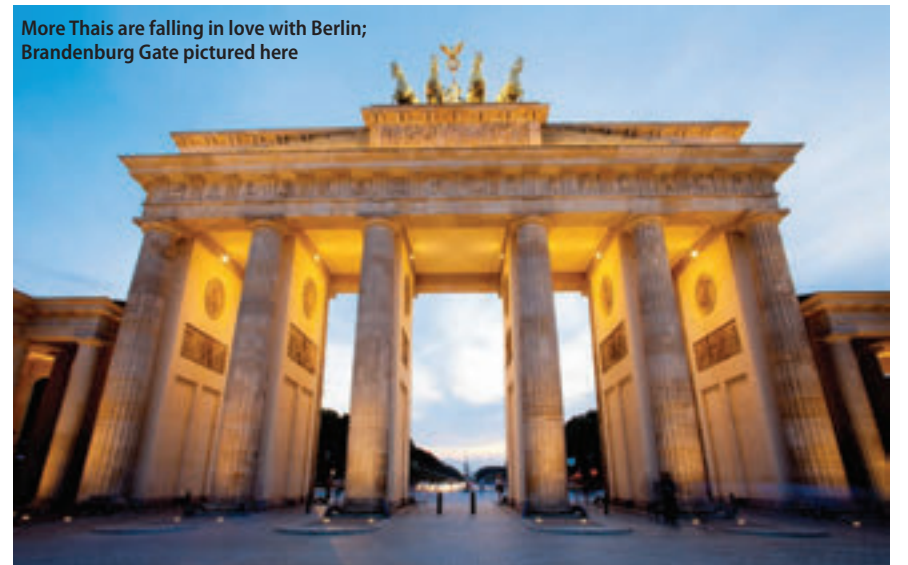
Other European destinations are gaining in popularity among Thais too, such as Russia which is attracting interest due to its weak rouble.

Grossmann told the *Daily* that “Berlin, Prague and Zurich are soaring destinations” among Thais.

However, difficulties in obtaining travel

visas could dull potential growth for outbound traffic to Europe, warned Suparerk, who remarked that treatment of Thai applicants “is not so good, not so friendly”.

He expects the visa application experience to worsen for Thai travellers as visa rules in Europe are tightened to guard against rising security issues. – **Michael Mackey**



More Thais are falling in love with Berlin; Brandenburg Gate pictured here



Legong Dance, Bali



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Destination **Singapore**

Lion's refreshed thirst for Europe

A new cruise partnership plus intensified destination marketing efforts will boost European arrivals. By **Paige Lee**

Although the Singapore dollar had stayed strong against the floundering euro in 2015, the Lion City remains an appealing destination among German travellers.

Some 223,562 Germans visited Singapore between January and October last year, reflecting a 2.6 per cent year-on-year growth. According to Chang Chee Pey, executive director, Europe, Singapore Tourism Board (STB), visitor arrivals from Germany have grown almost five per cent annually since 2010.

Chang said the market is drawn to "Singapore's diverse heritage and the juxtaposition of traditional and modern elements".

Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore's director of sales and marketing, Christopher Kang, told the *Daily* that his property had seen a 10 per cent growth in the number of German guests last year, over 2014.

"The increase in visitors was due in large part to the successful SG50 global campaign that boosted (arrivals) to Singapore," Kang said.

He added that the newly opened National Gallery Singapore is one of the new attractions that have contributed to a boost in international visits.

However, arrivals from Austria and Switzerland – two other German-speaking source markets – registered a slight year-on-year dip of 7.4 per cent to 20,489 visitors, and 3.3 per cent to 82,967 visitors respectively in the first 10 months of 2015.

Chang was unperturbed by the slip in Swiss arrivals. He explained that arrivals had peaked in 2014, with figures exceeding 100,000 arrivals for the first time, following the launch of new daily flights by Swissair in May 2013 as well as tactical pricing strategies by other airlines seeking to build their market share.

"While there was a slight dip in 2015, we are optimistic about the longer term potential of Switzerland and intend to invest more to grow our share of Swiss outbound visitors," he added.

There were also fewer guests from German-speaking markets at The Ritz-Carl-

German travellers are drawn to Singapore's mix of traditional and modern elements



ton, Millenia Singapore in 2015. Andreas Kohn, director of sales and marketing, said: "This could be attributed to fewer MICE events being held (in Singapore) that target the German-speaking markets, coupled with Singapore facing tough competition from neighbouring leisure destinations."

However, TUI Cruises' decision last November to make Singapore its seasonal homeport is expected to boost arrivals from German-speaking markets. This new partnership with STB and the Changi Airport Group targets to attract over 90,000 cruise passengers from Germany, Switzerland and Austria to South-east Asia in the next three years, generating an estimated S\$50 million (US\$35.6 million) in tourism receipts.

To support this partnership, Chang said: "We have stepped up our cruise marketing efforts in the German-speaking markets together with TUI Cruises. In addition, we have rolled out publicity and marketing activities such as collaborating with major tour operators like Thomas Cook and Expedia, and partnering leading publishing media house Gruner & Jahr (Thomas Cook) to increase interest in Singapore among German-speaking

travellers."

From July, Singapore Airlines will launch a thrice weekly direct flight from Singapore to Dusseldorf, Germany.

"With Düsseldorf being the 7th most populous city in Germany, the new direct flight will make it more convenient for about 17 to 18 million German passengers to fly to Singapore," Chang said.

Destination in numbers

1,341,804

The number of Europeans who visited Singapore from January to October 2015, a year-on-year decline of 0.3 per cent, with Germany ranked as the second largest source market from Europe after the UK

3.7 days

The average length of stay in Singapore for a German-speaking traveller. This has remained steady from the previous year

35

The number of weekly flights operated by Singapore Airlines to German cities, including twice-daily Singapore-Frankfurt services and daily Singapore-Munich services

VIEWPOINTS

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



Judy Lum, group vice president, sales & marketing, Tour East Singapore

Mainstream European travellers are independent. They prefer to have their own time and will book only basic packages. We are now working with tour operators on family holidays with family oriented activities, as well as high-end packages and special interest activities.

Dominic Ong, general manager, Star Holiday Mart

We are selling Singapore and Indonesia with our local partners in Bandung, and have incorporated new products like the Marina Barrage and Gardens by the Bay into city tour itineraries for these travellers. To win over more German-speaking travellers, we now also offer accommodation at Marina Bay Sands and/or a dining experience at a Michelin-star restaurant in our packages.



WHAT'S NEW

1 Park Hotel Alexandra

Park Hotel Alexandra has opened on the fringe of Singapore's CBD and close to business and leisure areas. The 443-key hotel boasts a 25-metre infinity pool, while its other facilities include a restaurant, a deli, a pool bar, a business centre and babysitting services.

2 Adrift by David Myers

Celebrity chef David Myers has marked his first foray into Singapore with the opening of Adrift in Marina Bay Sands. Inspired by the award-winning chef's travel experiences from across the globe, Adrift pays homage to the fusion of food cultures that reflect South-east Asian flavours and Californian flair.

3 Kidzania Singapore

Kidzania, an indoor family education and entertainment centre offering job role-playing opportunities for children aged four to 14, will be launching its Singapore



Adrift by David Myers

version in 1H2016. The 7,600m² KidZania Singapore on Sentosa's Palawan Beach will be able to accommodate up to 1,500 visitors. It will be the only KidZania attraction that is housed in a stand-alone building.

4 Hotel Jen Tanglin Singapore

Formerly Traders Hotel Cuscaden Road, the hotel has completed its rebranding and renovation works and now offers 565 rooms bearing contemporary Singapore-inspired designs with modern amenities. Facilities include a 17th-floor Club Lounge, restaurants, an outdoor swimming pool and pool bar, a gym, Jacuzzi and steam room, among others.

HOW TO SELL

DO Head over to **The Karting Arena @ Bukit Timah** for a taste of speedy thrills. This new attraction offers eight-minute sessions for S\$25, which should be good for 15 laps of the 500m circuit in Turf City. No driver's license is needed but for participants' safety, the maximum speed is capped at 50km per hour.

SEE Visit the **National Gallery Singapore** which opened to much fanfare last November. It has two permanent exhibitions and modern art collections from Singapore and South-east Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries, and is celebrated as the first museum in the world dedicated to South-east Asian modern art.

EAT **ME@OUE**, a restaurant on the rooftop of OUE Bayfront tower in Singapore's financial hub, offers a spectacular view of the Marina Bay and its iconic landmarks such as the Marina Bay Sands and Gardens by the Bay.

Its menu features Japanese, Chinese and French cuisine, and is curated by world-renowned chefs like one-Michelin-star chef Jérémy Gillon.

STAY Escape the city and stay at **D'Resort @ Downtown East**, which is nestled in the lush greenery of Pasir Ris Park. This 387-room property claims to be Singapore's first nature-inspired resort with an integrated water park. Room rates start from S\$118, which includes free Wi-Fi and access to the water park.



ME@OUE



“FOR THE BEAUTY AND THRILL SEEKERS”

GUA TEMPURUNG. Perak, Malaysia

This 4 hundred million years wondrous cave is one of the most extensive cave systems in Peninsular Malaysia. These caves are actually a breathtaking gallery of stalagmites and stalactites and other amazing rock formations which are superb speleological wonders found only in this part of the world. Now, with its ranger-guided tour, caving is possible for all ages!

Destination Sri Lanka

Rocky paths, uncertain futures

Sri Lanka's tourist industry will be heavily implicated should direct flights from Frankfurt be axed. By Feizal Samath



Sri Lanka has an aggressive marketing plan in place to draw more German-speaking tourists

Germany is one of Sri Lanka's strongest source markets in Europe along with the UK but the national carrier SriLankan Airlines' possible withdrawal from Frankfurt from mid-2016 could slow arrivals down this year. The airline currently operates four weekly flights from Frankfurt to Colombo.

SriLankan Airlines has been considering pulling out from some uneconomic sectors in Europe – with Paris, Frankfurt and Rome likely to be on the chopping block.

"There is no decision as yet but we are looking at a route rationalisation process (to cut costs)," an airline official said.

Hiran Cooray, president of the Tourist Hotels Association of Sri Lanka, said the hotels have urged the airline not to pull out from these three routes as business has been picking up.

He opined: "At this time when Europeans are finding it difficult to travel to Islamic countries, we should retain our market share instead of pulling out."

Last year, arrivals from Germany totalled 115,869, up 12.5 per cent from 2014.

In the case of other German speaking markets, arrivals from Switzerland rose 11.5 per cent to 22,418 in 2015 while arrivals from Austria rose by 12.5 per cent to 14,253 in 2015.

Althaf Mohammed Ali, vice president sales & marketing at Aitken Spence Hotels, said there was an upward trend in arrivals from German-speaking markets.

He said: "The growth was seen predominantly in beach stays, with a majority of the bookings generated through tour operators. Forming strategic alliances with our partners have had a positive impact on bookings, with key beach properties reflecting a twofold growth on the books to date."

Despite the international economic downturn, the outlook for 2016 appears positive for this market segment, he added.

As far as Ishanth Gunewardene, head of sales and marketing, Jetwing Hotels, is concerned, German-speaking markets have always been strong.

"We have seen solid and stable growth in 2015 with each country (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) posting over 10 per cent increase in arrivals," he said, adding

that winter bookings were excellent.

"We foresee the same for summer with the launch of new products that have an Ayurveda element such as Jetwing Kaduruketha and the expansion of Jetwing Ayurveda Pavilions," he added.

Ayurveda wellness and spa tours are also actively being promoted by operators here, expanding a market that has already captured the interest of many German travellers.

The German market has always been a steady one – even in the face of the worst recession in Europe – with growth tripling to 115,869 in 2015 from 45,981 in 2010.

Sri Lanka's main source market has been India, for more than a decade, followed by the UK. However, China surged to second place last year, with arrivals growing by 67.7 per cent from 2014. The UK dropped one notch to third place, followed by Germany and France as the other main markets.

Devindra Senaratne, managing director of Journey Scrapes Travel, and president of the Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Travel Operators, told the *Daily* that Germany has been a 'true' supporter of Sri Lanka with travellers from the country filling hotels during the years the country was at war (1983-2009).

Beach resorts, he said, depended on German arrivals to fill their occupancies as they stayed longer and came in large numbers.

Last year, Sri Lanka Tourism launched an aggressive marketing plan for Germany at ITB 2015. This was backed by a strong Sri Lankan private sector delegation of 53 companies that took part at the show. A roadshow was also held in Stuttgart, Berlin, Dusseldorf and Munich from September 20-25, 2015, followed by four months of advertising, officials said.

Acting Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau chairman, Paddy Withana, said

VIEWPOINTS

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



Chandra Wickramasinghe, chairman and managing director, Connaissance De Ceylan

The German market is getting very exciting

for us. This year we began exclusive Ayurvedic tours, a new concept, with a German operator who is handling Ayurvedic tours to Sri Lanka and Kerala. Visitors will spend five days at our Aliya Resort & Spa in Sigiriya, focusing on cultural and health aspects, before following an intensive eight-day Ayurvedic treatment at Maalu Maalu Resort & Spa in Pasikuda.



Nilmin Nanayakkara, managing director, Nkar Travels & Tours

All German-speaking countries have performed exceptionally well last year and we expect greater growth

this year. Realising this potential, our company recently appointed a sole representative based in Frankfurt to coordinate three markets – Germany, Switzerland and Austria – on our behalf. We are seeing positive results from this move.

the authorities will continue to focus on running fam tours for journalists and travel writers from the UK and Europe to further grow these markets.

WHAT'S NEW

1 Pinnawala Open Air Zoo

Sri Lanka's first open air zoo at Pinnawala offers visitors a chance to see donkeys, pelicans, monkeys and ponies at close range.

Attractions include a leopard enclosure, mixed deer enclosure and a petting area with a baby wild boar, rabbits and birds. Further expansion is planned as the zoo now only occupies 10ha of the 17.2ha area. The zoo is close to the popular Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage and the Maximus paper plant which produces paper products from elephant dung.

2 Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort

The international brand luxury property is located at Tangalle on the southern



Anantara Peace Haven Tangalle Resort

coast. To get there, Cinnamon Air offers a daily 30-minute seaplane flight from Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport to Dickwella, a 10-minute drive from the resort.

Set on a 8.4ha coconut plantation by the beach, the 152 guest rooms and villas offer feature handwoven custom-made Sri Lankan furnishings, contemporary amenities and al fresco spaces to relax and enjoy stunning ocean views.

3 Good Market

On a Saturday, make a trip down to the Good Market at Colombo Racecourse. Vendors will be there selling a range of food products like fruits, vegetables, rice, spices, coconut, tea and organic farm products. There will also handicrafts, health, beauty and home products available, along with live music and children's programmes.

4 Grande Gourmet at Nirj's

Located in the heart of Colombo, this is Sri Lanka's first fine dining French restaurant. The place is designed in the style of the French romantic period of the 19th century.

HOW TO SELL

EAT *Kottu roti*, referred to as 'Sri Lanka's hamburger', is a must-try dish. A simple but delicious comfort food, *kottu* is often served starting from lunchtime onward.

However, a good cheese *kottu* can only be found after 19.00. Because of its availability in the evening, many places selling the local favourite stay open past midnight, as *kothu* is a popular snack for those who choose to indulge in the island's nightlife.

SEE Witness the gathering of more than 500 elephants at the **Minneriya National Park** while on safari in the evenings during the month of August. The national park in Sri Lanka's North Central Province is known to attract large numbers of elephants that are drawn to grass fields near the reservoir.

DO **Tamarind Gardens** is a community-based project operating in Digana created to benefit the local community by helping to develop farming, support initiatives and increase income from tourism. By spending a couple of days at the property – a charming homestay –



Minneriya National Park

guests are directly contributing to the village's well-being while also experiencing rural village life in Sri Lanka.

With just four bungalows, designed to reflect typical village homes, the homestay encourages visitors to become involved in the community work and help around the farm.

STAY The country's historic **Galle Face Hotel** has completed a 30-month long restoration of its North Wing's 72 rooms and suites, restaurants, bars, lobby, ballrooms and executive lounge.

First opened in 1864, the hotel's interiors now come with mahogany furnishings and grey marble casing in its bathroom walls. There is also now a 120m² signature suite, the Empress Eugenie, featuring a 60m² terrace.



MERITUS
PELANGI BEACH
RESORT & SPA
LANGKAWI



Be ushered into a haven of tropical tranquility and ethnic charm at *Meritus Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa, Langkawi*, located along the white sandy beaches of the famous Cenang Beach and a mere 15-minute drive from Langkawi International Airport.

Fronting a kilometre-stretch of private beach, the resort is designed in the rustic style of a traditional Malay village. 355 guestrooms and suites are housed in clusters of single- and double-storey wooden chalets built on stilts, and each with spacious verandahs overlooking spectacular ocean and garden views. The villas are equipped with modern conveniences, with the interiors designed to pay homage to the local culture.

Dubbed “The Jewel of Langkawi,” this 35-acre resort is surrounded by smaller islands, waterfalls and golden sandy beaches, promising a tranquil and relaxing experience to holidaymakers and business travellers alike.

Blending seamlessly with the resort’s landscape are themed food and beverage outlets that include *Spice Market*, an all-day dining restaurant serving an array of Asian favourites alongside a comprehensive menu of Western options; *Cba*, a beachside restaurant and bar that transforms into a happening nightspot; *Pelangi Lounge*, a lobby lounge serving cocktails and refreshments to the accompaniment of nightly live bands; and *Cascade Pool Bar*, a swim-up island bar serving signature thirst quenchers and light bites.

The versatile mix of water sports and outdoor activities offered at the resort is complemented by wellness and rejuvenation facilities that include a state-of-the-art fitness centre and *Pelangi Spa*, where guests can enjoy signature offerings of holistic beauty and massage therapies in a Zen-inspired setting.

Meritus Beach Resort & Spa, Langkawi continues to be a widely popular destination with MICE organisers for its versatile indoor and outdoor venues ideal for team building activities and themed events. Corporate guests can also enjoy exclusive privileges and personalised service in the tropical environment of the resort’s *Meritus Club Lounge*.

Enjoy best available rates when you book direct on www.meritushotels.com/pelangi.



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MERITUS
HOTELS & RESORTS

Destination Thailand

LIMITS TESTED

Thailand emerged from the trying events of 2015 with its German inbound still buoyant, finds **Xinyi-Liang Pholsena**

FITs discover Thailand's small southern islands; Yang Island, Satun province Thailand pictured



What initially seemed like a year fraught with political and economic uncertainties for Thailand turned out to be a record-breaking one for the country's travel sector, as tourism performance indicators from arrival numbers to hotel occupancies did better than expected.

As a source market for Thailand, Germany continues to be a dominant force in Europe, ranking third after the UK and Russia respectively. From January to November 2015, Thailand welcomed 671,948 arrivals from Germany, a 7.2 per cent year-on-year growth. The other German-

speaking markets of Switzerland and Austria, meanwhile, accounted for 178,795 arrivals (+3.3 per cent) and 85,604 arrivals (-2.4 per cent) respectively.

Tourism players in Thailand too look back at a satisfying year from the German-speaking markets.

Seeing a "healthy" demand from Germany is Ramada Plaza Bangkok Menam Riverside, as arrivals grew 9.2 per cent to the hotel while overnight statistics rose 8.9 per cent, according to the general manager Klaus Sennik.

Elaborating on the similar growth in German business the hotel's agent partners has recorded, Sennik commented:

"Consolidating the performance of agents specialised in German markets, there's an increase of 24 per cent on arrivals, 22 per cent on overnight statistics and 22 per cent in total revenue.

"If we look at the OTA's production (in 2015), Germany is among the top three nationalities that chose our hotel on Booking.com and Expedia," he added.

Also upbeat on the German market, Debrah Pascoe, vice president, sales & marketing, Onyx Hospitality Group, said: "Despite the various challenges faced by Thailand in 2015, the German market has remained fairly resilient, with growth seen in some of our resort destinations. Ozo Chaweng Samui, our select-service beach-front resort option, is performing particularly well among German travellers."

Pascoe voiced the hotel group's expectations for stronger performance and growth in 2016 following the April reopening of Amari Koh Samui after a full renovation.

As German travellers continue to head to Thailand in bigger numbers, inbound agents are also observing how this mature market is evolving.

"Traditionally the German-speaking markets have been led by the big tour operators, but these days the German market is definitely becoming more discerning and travellers are looking for more boutique-style experiences and lifestyle brands that offer experiential activities for all the family," Pornthip Hirunkate, deputy CEO and Thailand managing director, Destination Asia told the Daily.

Growing in tandem is the stronger FIT preference of the German travellers, who are "great explorers" constantly in search of new off-the-beaten-track experiences, Pornthip noted. She said: "The small

Destination in numbers

17.9 days

The average length of stay of German travellers in Thailand in 1H2015

US\$105.95

The per capita spending of German travellers in Thailand in 1H2015

671,948

The number of arrivals from Germany to Thailand from January to November 2015, an increase of 7.2 per cent year-on-year

southern islands are definitely high up on their exploration list. This includes Khanom beach in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Koh Kood (in Trat), Koh Lipe (in Satun), and Koh Racha and Koh Yao (near Phuket)."

Tobias Fischer, director of business development at Go Vacation Thailand, also sees Germans' growing interest in the country's lesser-known beaches. He noted: "Interest in Phuket is spreading beyond Patong and Kata to other beaches like Mai Khao. While Krabi used to suffer in Phuket's shadow, it's now shining for the German market, especially repeat travellers. Other destinations coming up include Koh Chang, Khao Lak and Hua Hin."

VIEWPOINTS

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



Klaus Sennik, general manager, Ramada Plaza Bangkok Menam Riverside

We will continue to strengthen our ties with leading German operators and continue

partnering with local and international agents, through all this submitting contract renewals early for advance sales and bookings. We will also support Tourism Authority of Thailand offices in German-speaking countries in their campaigns to promote Thailand, and continue to feature our hotel in the agents' brochures and in industry magazines. We will push sales through packages with agents and airlines as well as apply yield management strategies with various partners.

Pornthip Hirunkate, deputy CEO and Thailand managing director, Destination Asia



We still see the potential in this market, which has led us to hire a Germany-based sales representative to help our partners grow their business to Thailand. We are also planning a German roadshow in 2016 to showcase the best of Destination Asia Thailand, with new product offerings to help us grow and re-establish solid working partnerships.

WHAT'S NEW

1 Mövenpick Siam Hotel Pattaya

Mövenpick Siam Hotel Pattaya, located at Na Jomtien, 15km south of Pattaya City and 20 minutes from U-Tapao Rayong-Pattaya International Airport, opened on December 15.

The 262-room resort has three dining outlets, function spaces, banquet facilities, an outdoor lagoon pool, a water sports area and a fully-equipped fitness centre, on top of offering golf concierge, island cruises and other services.

2 Amatara Resort & Wellness

The former Regent Phuket Cape Panwa was rebranded as the Amatara Resort & Wellness in October 2015.

The rebranded 105-room resort will focus on developing itself as a wellness destination, where the 2,000m² Amatara Spa will be extended to include the Thai Hamam therapies, a salt relaxation room and Rhassoul clay treatments. Located on Cape Panwa on Phuket's south-

eastern coast, the property also offers six F&B outlets.

3 Nok Air

Nok Air commenced services from Bangkok-Don Mueang since December 1, 2015. The four-times weekly service operates on a Boeing 737-800 aircraft with a capacity of 189 seats.

NokScoot also started flying between Bangkok-Don Mueang and Taipei-Taoyuan from October 25 with four flights a week. The flights are operated by a Boeing 777-200, which can accommodate up to 415 passengers.

4 Multiple Entry Tourist Visa

On November 13, 2015, Thailand introduced the new Multiple Entry Tourist Visa (METV) for travellers. The six-month METV costs 5,000 baht (US\$139) and grants travellers unlimited entries into Thailand with up to 60 days per stay within a six-month period. It can be obtained from Thai embassies and consulates worldwide. More information at www.thaiembassy.org.

5 The Chiang Mai Riverside

A new luxury property by the Ping River, The Chiang Mai Riverside offers 14 Lanna-inspired suites, 24-hour butler service, Apple digital entertainment systems and a Local Knowledge concierge offering insider access to the Rose of the North.

The design of the all-suite property echoes the heritage of the Lanna kingdom, which come to life in luxurious one- and two-bedroom suites.

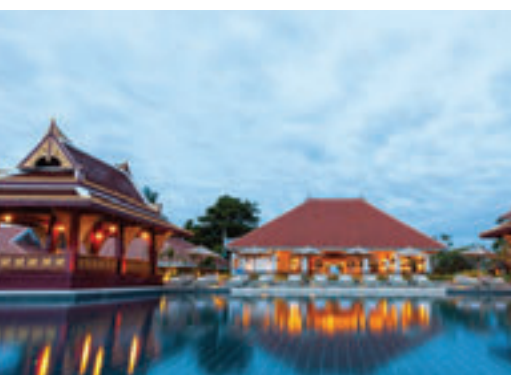
HOW TO SELL

DO **Artbox Bangkok** is the newest hipster market in the capital, offering locally-designed products, clothes and food sold from stores housed inside giant shipping containers. The pop-up market shifts its location periodically, so check its Facebook page for its whereabouts.

SEE Dubbed the River of Kings, the **Chao Phraya River** is the lifeblood of Bangkok and meanders through the heart of the city. The best way to experience this bustling waterway is to join the locals in using the public ferry, while observing the slow barges coasting upstream, riverine markets and soaring hotels and condominiums rising from both sides of the banks.

EAT Bangkok is fast becoming a fine-dining capital, having attracted scores of Michelin-star chefs to launch outposts in the city. Dutch chef Henk Savelberg has brought his eponymous restaurant – **Savelberg** – to the Oriental Residence Bangkok to serve modern cuisine with strong French influences.

STAY One of the hottest openings in 2015, **Keemala Phuket** is a boutique retreat with 38 pool villas set amid a lush rainforest overlooking the Andaman Sea. Designed to represent the island's mythical early settlers, the property features a swimming pool, a spa and three dining outlets connected by jungle walkways.



Amatara Resort & Wellness

Incredible India

WELCOME WORLD



Kaziranga National Park, Assam.

Visit India Pavilion Hall 5.2b

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the time of travel

Destination **Malaysia**

Keeping hopeful fingers crossed

Inbound agents are optimistic that German-speaking tourists can be enticed to visit despite flight cuts. By **S Puvaneswary**

The suspension of MAS flights has affected tourist destinations such as Langkawi



Destination in numbers

9.9 nights

The average length of stay of German tourists to Malaysia in 2014, as compared to 9.8 nights in 2013

RM395.10

The per diem expenditure of Swiss tourists to Malaysia, equivalent to US\$90.30. This is a significant increase of 24.4 per cent compared with 2013

34.8%

The percentage growth in receipts from Swiss tourists in 2014, to RM118 million. Receipts from German tourists saw a 10.7 per cent growth in 2014 to RM501 million, as compared to 2013

For inbound agents strong in the German-speaking markets, 2015 was a bleak year. Europeans hurt by a weakened euro slashed travel budgets by US\$20 to US\$50 a day, noted Alex Lee, CEO of Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours, while Manfred Kurz, managing director of Diethelm Travel Malaysia, said travellers skipped the Far East in favour of short- and medium-haul destinations.

The situation was made worse after Malaysia Airlines (MAS) suspended its five-weekly direct flights between Kuala Lumpur and Frankfurt on May 29, 2015.

Part of a major cost-cutting programme, inbound travel specialists said that this has had a negative impact on

business. However, they are hopeful that the market will recover in 2016.

Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, managing director, Yap Sook Ling, said: "It impacted travel bookings especially for tourists who were interested in visiting places beyond Kuala Lumpur, such as Sabah, Sarawak, Penang and Langkawi. MAS' special fares to these extended locations for flights from Frankfurt to Kuala Lumpur is now unavailable post the flight cancellation.

"Most Germans are long-stay tourists, many of whom spend 17 days or more in the country. When there is no special add-on fare, we are certain to lose market share to Thailand which has more direct flights and special fares on add-on sectors on Thai Airways."

Agreeing, Andy Yow, director of sales and marketing at Langkawi's Rebak Island - Vivanta by Taj, said "extra measures have to be put in place by tourism authorities to ensure secondary destinations remains a top-of-mind recall for the German-speaking markets".

The resort introduced a stay-five-pay four-nights promotion on December 1, 2015. Marketed until November 30, 2016, this is targeted specifically at guests from Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

Yow said: "Since this promotion was launched, we have seen a spike in interest on forward bookings. The resort is also constructing a new Jiva spa which is scheduled for completion in Q32016. We are convinced that the spa will entice more German tourists to visit our resort."

Yow said the German-speaking market is a good one as the average guest stays between five and seven nights and generates ancillary revenue through laundry services and F&B consumption.

Yap said her company had tied up with several hospitals in Kuala Lumpur and Penang to offer packages combining sightseeing with medical check-ups, dental and cosmetic surgery, all targeted at the German-speaking markets.

When asked about his outlook for 2016, Kurz said: "We are positive that if nothing negative happens worldwide and the European economy improves, we will see double-digit growth.

"We believe that many Germans who held back their longhaul travel plans in 2015 will resume their travels in 2016."

■ HOW TO SELL

DO Visit **Royal Selangor Visitor Centre** in Setapak Jaya, just 20 minutes' drive from Kuala Lumpur City Centre. Through complimentary guided tours, visitors will learn about the remarkable development of tin mining in the Malay Peninsula in the 1800s as well as view traditional pewtersmithing tools, antique pewter and ancient tin currency at the centre's Pewter Museum.

Visitors with a little more time on their hands may not want to miss out on making their own pewter products. For a nominal fee, visitors may participate in Royal Selangor's School of Hard Knocks pewtersmithing workshop where the participants create their very own pewter dish, or The Foundry where they get to make pewter accessories from scratch.



From left: Royal Selangor Visitor Centre; Mud, our story of Kuala Lumpur



SEE **Mud, our Story of Kuala Lumpur** is a musical celebrating the spirit of Kuala Lumpur city and the people who built it with hopes and dreams. This 50-minute live performance is shown twice daily at 15.00 and 20.30, except on the second and fourth Monday of every month. The show runs up to April 2017. Tickets are available for purchase

online at www.mudkl.com or over the counter at Panggung Bandaraya, Jalan Raja, Kuala Lumpur from 10.00 to 21.00. Agent bookings can be made via booking@mudkl.com

EAT Located on Level 56 of Tower 3 Petronas, **Nobu Kuala Lumpur** offers innovative Japanese cuisine which is complemented with

stunning views of Petronas Twin Towers and Kuala Lumpur's skyline. Nobu Kuala Lumpur's main dining area and sushi bar can accommodate up to 200 guests. Nobu also houses two bars, a lounge and private dining rooms.

STAY The **482-key Aloft Kuala Lumpur Sentral** is among the

newer hotels in Kuala Lumpur. Opened in 2013 in Sentral district – regarded as the capital city's new CBD – and adjacent to Kuala Lumpur Sentral Station, guests enjoy easy access to the airports and attractions such as Little India, Bird Park, National Museum and Botanical Lake Garden. Wi-Fi is free throughout the property.

VIEWPOINTS

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

Ganneesh Ramaa, manager, Luxury Tours Malaysia

We will design interactive programmes promoting sustainable tourism. Examples of these are walking tours using local modes of transportation and visits to local villages where tourists can interact with the locals.



KL Tan, general manager, Borneo Trails Tours & Travel

We will promote medical tourism to the German speaking markets. In Sabah, consultation appointments are easy to obtain and costs of medical procedures are cheaper than in Europe. We will also continue to promote our iconic eco-tourism products in Sabah such as whitewater rafting, kayaking, caving and climbs to the summit of Mount Kinabalu.

WHAT'S NEW



From left: Aiman Batang Ai Resort & Retreat; The St Regis Langkawi



1 Mount Kinabalu

Climbers can trek to the summit of Mount Kinabalu in Sabah, Malaysia, from December 1, 2015, using a new trail from Laban Rata to Sayat-Sayat Hut as the old trail was damaged by a magnitude 6.0 earthquake on June 5, 2015.

2 Al Halabi Gourmet Restaurant

Situated on Level 7, Pavilion Kuala Lumpur, the restaurant features an open kitchen that allows diners to look in and experience the plethora of fresh ingredients used in preparing Middle Eastern dishes. Top chefs from the Middle East helm Al Halabi's kitchen, so gastronomic satisfaction is guaranteed.

3 Aiman Batang Ai Resort & Retreat

The former Batang Ai Longhouse Resort, managed by Hilton, reopened after refurbishment on January 1, 2016 as Aiman Batang Ai Resort & Retreat under Planet Borneo Lodge Management.

The 100-key property, located on the fringe of the Batang Ai National Park in Sarawak, offers a refreshing natural environment. Activities include fishing in the Batang Ai Lake, kayaking and nature excursions.

4 Mitsui Outlet Park KLIA Sepang

Located a 10-minute drive from Kuala Lumpur International Airport, visitors can expect discounts ranging from 30 per cent to 70 per cent year round on off-season international and local branded products.

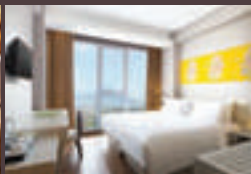
5 The St Regis Langkawi

The St Regis Langkawi will open in 2Q2016 within an idyllic cove close to Kuah town, Langkawi's shopping and commercial centre. Some 85 suites and four over-water villas are offered, along with facilities such as the renowned Iridium Spa, a fitness centre and pool.



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Destination **India**

Confident in the new year



German-speaking markets into India remained stagnant in 2015; Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus pictured

Despite 2015's stagnant economy, the trade remains optimistic for 2016. By **Rohit Kaul**

Last year turned out to be a stagnant year for India's inbound tourism market from German-speaking markets.

Despite Germany having been included in the list of countries that has been offered the e-tourist visa facility to ease the process of visa procurement, a large number of tour operators witnessed sluggish business.

Swadesh Kumar, founder of the Shikhar Group of Companies, said: "The European economic slowdown has hit the inbound business from German-speaking markets very badly. There was no growth last year."

Traditionally, Germany has been one of the top 10 source markets for India, while the share of arrivals from Switzerland and Austria is smaller.

As per the latest available statistics at press time from India's ministry of tourism, the country recorded 7.68 million tourist arrivals in 2014, where German arrivals were in the 10th position with 239,000 tourists, a 3.11 per cent market share. In comparison to 2013, Germany was seventh with 252,000 arrivals and a

slightly larger 3.62 per cent market share. Tourists from Austria amounted to 34,360 in 2014, a decline of 5.8 per cent from the previous year, while Switzerland recorded 45,773 arrivals, registering a decline of 6.2 per cent from 2013.

"German-speaking markets to India in 2015 remained stagnant and growth was negligible in spite of efforts by the ministry of tourism and travel trade partners. However, with the introduction of e-tourist visa facility, the market showed some revival in the latter part of the year," said Subhash Goyal, president, Indian Association of Tour Operators.

"Demand from Germany declined in 2015, but it was still better than other European markets. However, the total volume was lower than expected," said Ravi Gosain, director, Erco Travels.

Some tour operators recorded an increase in business from these markets despite economic slowdown.

"The German-speaking market never stops travelling irrespective of the economic situation. SITA adapted its offering and saw fabulous results from the German market in 2015," said Dipak Deva, CEO – India & South Asia, SITA (Thomas Cook India Group).

"Tours that were heritage centric and tours that offered an experiential element were more popular. Travellers from this market are keen to learn about India and

understand its people," added Deva.

In spite of tough times, Indian tour operators remain optimistic about the prospects for German-speaking markets.

"We expect that the e-tourist visa scheme will help us to revive German-speaking markets in 2016," said Goyal.

Some tour operators opined there is a need to revive charter business from Germany that used to exist earlier, which will go a long way to significantly increase tourist arrivals from German-speaking markets.

"There was a time when Goa used to get a good number of German charter business. Many German tourists prefer beach resorts. If we can work towards increasing charter movement from Germany, the numbers can go up significantly," said Amaresh Tiwari, managing director of A.T. Seasons & Vacations Travel.

India's ministry of tourism recognises the importance of German-speaking markets and is keen to increase tourist arrival figures.

"India has already eased its visa regime for German-speaking markets. We expect tourist arrivals from Germany to increase in 2016. We will continue to promote India by engaging travel agents there through our roadshows and participation in trade events like ITB Berlin," said Vinod Zutshi, secretary, ministry of tourism, India.

■ HOW TO SELL

DO **River rafting** in Ladakh in India's northern region offers a one-of-its-kind experience. During the course of rafting one can experience the spectacular landscape complete with deep gorges, snow-capped peaks and hilltop monasteries. Alternatively, travellers can join a **trekking** expedition to and visit villages that offer glimpses into the lives of locals.

SEE Visit one of India's most important monuments, The Red Fort in **Old Delhi**. The contrast of the area when compared to New Delhi gives it a unique identity.

Old Delhi has an old world charm and is constantly buzzing with activity with the many shoppers and food enthusiasts thronging the place.

EAT **Caprese** is a restaurant located on level 18 of Shangri-La Hotel, Bengaluru. It offers Spanish tapas, Middle Eastern mezze platters and Italian dishes.

Caprese boasts is adorned with sculptures and hanging metal lanterns. It has a total indoor and outdoor seating capacity for 94 guests.

STAY Nestled in the Aravalli Hills of Rajasthan, **Samode Palace** is located about 43km north-west of Jaipur and features 43 spacious rooms and suites. A highlight is the hotel's "Maharaja Evening" where guests can enjoy a camel cart procession accompanied by a local band and torch bearers, folk dances and fireworks.



Red Fort's Hall of Audience

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



RK Mishra, managing director, Eastern Travels

We will be participating at ITB Berlin this year to promote Odisha as a new destination among German tourists. The state of Odisha has beaches and heritage sites that can appeal to German-speaking markets. This is something that we want to promote with the help of our travel trade partners in those markets.



Arun Anand, managing director, Midtown Travels

Tourists from German-speaking markets are experiential tourists. Besides the already popular Indian tourist destinations, we are looking to promote new destinations like Madhya Pradesh, Ladakh and the north-east region of the country. We are educating our trade partners about these destinations through sales calls.



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Destination India

WHAT'S NEW

1 Air India New Delhi-San Francisco flights

India's national carrier, Air India recently started direct thrice-weekly flights between New Delhi-San Francisco. The flight will have a three-class configuration, with eight seats in first, 35 in business and 195 in economy class.

This will be the airline's fourth destina-



tion in the US, after New York, Newark and Chicago.

2 Air Canada's New Delhi-Toronto flights

Air Canada recently commenced direct four times weekly direct flights between Toronto and New Delhi. The route is served by a Boeing 787-9 series aircraft with a three-class configuration of 29 business, 21 premium economy seats and 237 economy.

3 Pullman & Novotel New Delhi Aerocity

France-based hospitality group, AccorHotels introduced its second dual brand property in India, this time combining Pullman and Novotel hotels.

Officially opened on November 3, 2015, the Pullman & Novotel New Delhi Aerocity project features a combined inventory of 670 rooms, and convention spaces of more than 3,700m².

4 The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel Delhi

The 480-room hotel is strategically located near the historic Old Delhi as well as the central business districts of Delhi, Ghaziabad and Noida.

The property offers more than 6,500m² of multipurpose meeting and banqueting space, including a pillarless ballroom boasting a pre-function area in excess of 2,780m², with the capacity to host about 6,000 guests reception-style and 2,500 seated theatre-style.

5 Toast - Bistro & Bar

Located within the newly opened four-star business boutique hotel, T24 Residency in Mumbai, Toast - Bistro & Bar combines a fine dining experience with the ambience of a chic bistro bar.

Expect classic Indian favourites from kebabs to steamed idlis, fries made in an egg coddler to hot soup in a coffee cup. Check out the six-metre-long bar counter and its extensive menu that features international beer, spirits and liquors.



The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel Delhi

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Destination in numbers

34,360

The number of tourist arrivals from Austria in 2014, a decline of 5.8 per cent over 2013

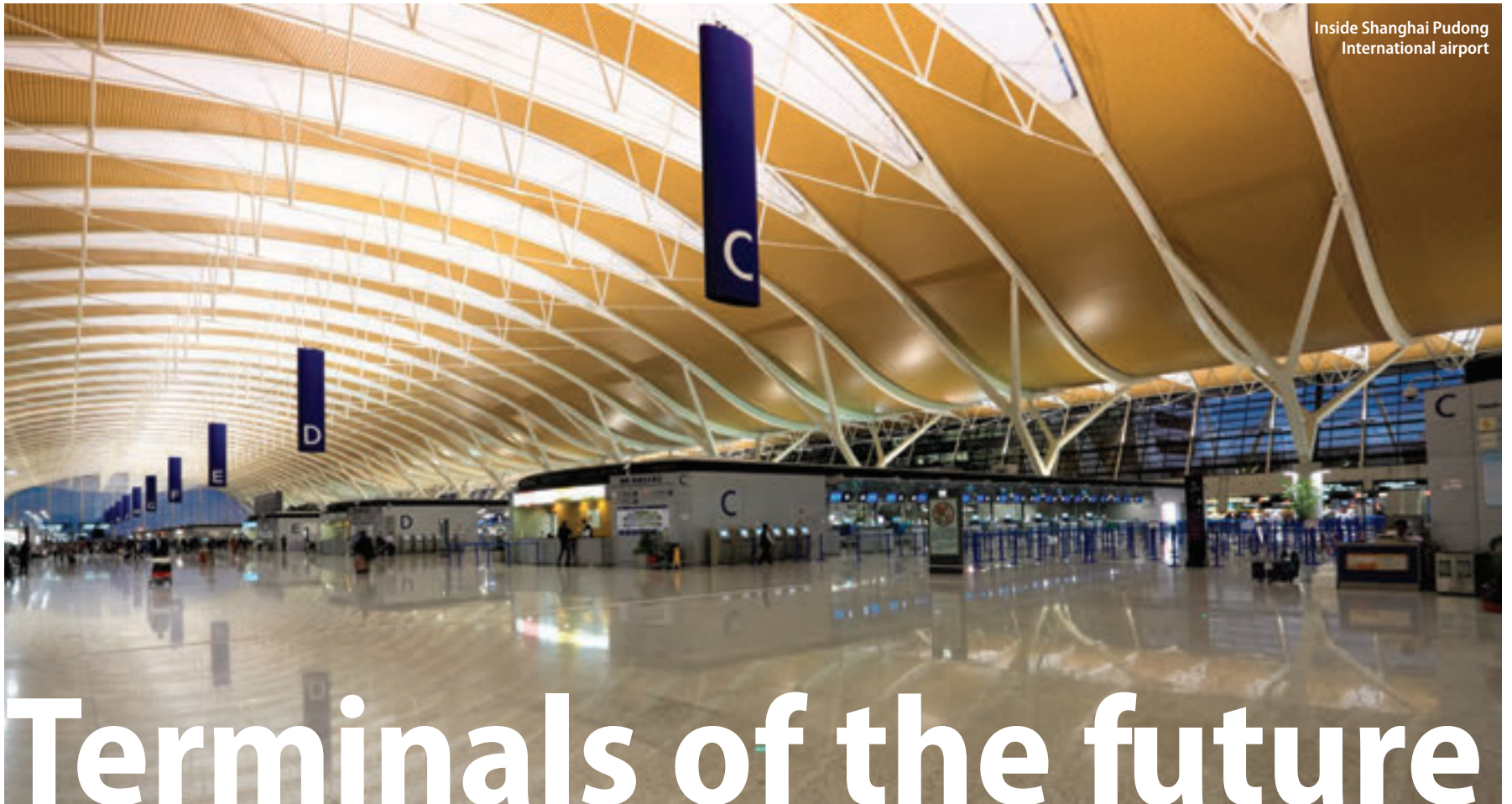
45,773

The number of tourist arrivals from Switzerland in 2014, a decline of 6.2 per cent over 2013

239,000

The number of tourist arrivals from Germany in 2014

Special report Airport terminals



Terminals of the future

Mobile biometric carts, cloud technology and facial recognition systems aim to make the airport passenger experience less of a hassle. [Sim Kok Chwee](#) takes a look at new ideas in airport design and planning

Every flight for a traveller begins and ends with an airport experience and the quality of that experience has the potential to make or break the trip. Memories of yesteryear when one could breeze through all the formalities and board a plane are just distant memories as travellers today brave long queues at immigration and cumbersome security screening.

The post-9/11 airport landscape has seen added layers of security and long snaking queues at immigration and customs clearance, turning checkpoints into choke points. The impacts are felt not only by airlines which have to deploy staff to “extricate and expedite” passengers on flights that are departing shortly, but also the retail and dining concessionaires as every minute that travellers are stuck in a queue is a minute not spent browsing the retail outlets or dining at an F&B venue.

Frost & Sullivan’s *Global Airport Passenger Screening Market* report indicated that a slew of new technologies such as portal scanners, biometric collection de-

vices and pre-clearance based on background investigations will transform the passenger screening process and result in unobtrusive screening. The investment in such technologies is hefty, estimated at US\$1.4 billion in 2014 and increasing slightly to US\$1.6 billion in 2020.

Frost & Sullivan’s senior industry analyst, John Hernandez, said: “One solution could be to supply passengers with alternate venues and automated tools to pre-screen them before they arrive at the airport.”

Identification of high-risk passengers prior to their arrival at the airport is a key element in improving security and airports are also considering innovative technologies capable of screening large numbers of passengers quickly and accurately.

Near field communication (NFC)

Many airlines and airports today work with 2D QR-coded boarding passes sent to mobile devices but there is an inherent distrust in this system as boarding passes can be forwarded, duplicated and ma-

nipulated. And when this code is not recognised or retrieved, travellers will need to have their identity verified and their boarding passes printed. This is a time-consuming process.

A short-range communication system using wireless technology that connects two devices, NFC got off to an uncertain start but momentum has been gained since 2005.

SITA and Orange have entered into a partnership to roll out a SIM-based solution that loads the boarding pass into a travel wallet in the traveller’s mobile phone at the end of a counter or kiosk check-in. This can then be used to tap into a device that grants access to lounges and boarding gates. There is no need for any mobile phone applications, boarding pass or data connectivity. This even works when the mobile phone is turned off.

In 2014, SITA and Orange partnered Air France to put Touch&Pass on a six-month trial at Toulouse-Blagnac Airport, where selected passengers with NFC-enabled smartphones flying between

Toulouse and Paris Orly were able to pass through airport checkpoints by tapping their phones against dedicated readers. A previous trial was also conducted at Nice Airport. The system being trialed conformed to standards from IATA and GSMA (which represents the interest of mobile operators worldwide).

Meanwhile, NFC is already in use at Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane airports where passengers with Android devices can download content from digital screens while waiting to board their flights.

IATA Checkpoint of the Future (CoF)

Goals of the IATA CoF initiative are pivoted towards strengthening security, increasing operational efficiency, improving passenger experience through the reduction of queue and waiting times, and the use of technology for a less invasive and disruptive search.

CoF entered its concept definition stage in 2012 where the regulatory requirements, policies, operational scenarios and technologies used were considered. The development of CoF has since included the participation of Airports Council International and specific targets were contained in the CoF2014 blueprint, with a further CoF2017 blueprint as the next objective.

By 2020, when the CoF2020 blueprint is reached, it is envisaged that “the passenger will be able to flow through the security checkpoint without interruption unless the advanced technology identifies a potential threat”. Each passenger will be assigned a level of security screening based on states of departure and arrival through real-time bilateral risk assessments.

Changi Airport’s Terminal 4

Singapore’s Changi Airport is one of the world’s more progressive airports with a proven track record of building capacity ahead of demand. It is currently operating at more than 80 per cent of its designed



Special report Airport terminals

capacity of 66 million passengers per annum.

In 2017, Terminal 4 (T4) will be opened with a capacity for 16 million passengers annually. Six airlines – Cathay Pacific, Korean Air, Vietnam Airlines, AirAsia, Indonesia AirAsia and Thai AirAsia – will migrate to this new terminal. In 2014, these airlines collectively carried seven million passengers.

The development of T4 has presented Singapore with the opportunity to implement its Fast and Seamless Travel (FAST) initiative, which is anchored by a suite of self-service and automated options from check-in and baggage handling to immigration clearance and boarding.

FAST is supplemented by biometric facial recognition technology to eliminate the current need for manual identity verification at a minimum of five touchpoints. In a major shift in concept, a centralised and more efficient security screening system will be introduced at T4, a change from T1, T2 and T3 where security screening takes place at each boarding gate.

Changi Airport Group’s executive vice-president, Yam Kum Weng, said: “With T4’s emphasis on innovation and productivity, passengers can expect passage through the various touchpoints to be smoother and stress-free, giving them more time to enjoy the facilities and wide array of shopping and dining options.”

Biocarts at Japanese airports

Passengers arriving at Japanese airports in the future (possibly sometime after 2017) could see relief at the immigration hall. The increase in foreign visitors in recent years has resulted in longer queues and the Justice Ministry is seeking an allocation for “biocarts” in the fiscal 2016 budget. These are mobile stations that capture



The Fast and Seamless Travel (FAST) initiative will be rolled out progressively throughout Changi Airport’s terminals

passport information, a visitor’s mugshot and fingerprint, which will be digitally transmitted to the immigration desk.

The time a visitor spends at the desk could be reduced by half, according to a senior Justice Ministry official. From January to June 2015, the longest waiting time for immigration was 36 minutes at Osaka Kansai, 20 minutes at Tokyo Narita, and 24 minutes at Tokyo Haneda and Nagoya Chubu.

“Cloud” over Perth Airport

As part of Perth Airport’s AU\$1 billion (US\$714 million) investment in “an overall transformation of infrastructure”, it has signed an agreement with Amadeus to introduce ACUS (Airport Common Use Service).

This cloud-based technology makes

use of application virtualisation that allows passenger processing systems to be accessed and deployed anywhere on demand, and on platforms ranging from desktops to laptops, tablets and other mobile devices. Passengers may be checked-in and their boarding passes printed from any location. The same devices can handle passenger processing for multiple airlines at the same time.

Concierge on the ground and in the air

SabreSonic CSS is offering airlines and airports its Mobile Concierge mobile check-in solution that promises to bring check-in agents from behind their counters to become roving customer service agents.

Working on mobile devices, agents can check in passengers, print boarding passes and baggage tags while at the same time provide a more personalised service. The system is also able to identify when a high-value customer has entered the airport vicinity and requires check-in.

The integration of a credit card and passport reader facilitates the capture of passenger information and ancillary purchases. The end result of the implementation of this technology is the reduction of passenger queueing and reduced costs by saving time and allowing ground staff to be more efficient. This system can also be further expanded to identify and deliver additional services for high-value customers in the airports and airplane cabin.

Privacy concerns, security of personal information and state security dictate that the roll-out of most such evolving technologies will take time. Until then, there are steps that airports and travellers can take to mitigate the bottlenecks and frus-

trations at security check points.

These include standardisation of requirements and processes at airports around the world; sign-posting security requirements a distance ahead of security checkpoints; and providing space for travellers to remove all necessary items before joining security screening queues.

Travellers can also do their bit by minimising the amount of metallic jewellery and accessories worn, and keeping mobile devices such as laptops and tablets more accessible as these must be taken out of hand luggage during security screenings.

Aviareps’ chairman and CEO Michael Gaebler noted that today’s travellers are much more connected and Asian airports are ahead of their European counterparts in providing Wi-Fi connection. With airports turning into mega malls in many cities, Gaebler feels that passengers will greatly appreciate high ceilings with more natural light and, most importantly, quiet zones.

Thankfully, there are airports in the Asia-Pacific region that already have light and airy terminals, themed gardens, quiet snoozing corners and spa facilities with swimming pools. Travellers at Incheon Airport can even gain hands-on experience in Korean arts and crafts, and witness a royal procession as it weaves through the terminal several times a day.

Indeed, the already pampered traveller’s airport experience is all set for a game-changing revolution in the coming decade. Hub airports and those aspiring to be one will have to make that big leap in mindset and investment to offer a more pleasant experience from kerbside to aerobridge and vice versa.



Immigration clearance at Narita International Airport will be quicker once the futuristic “biocarts” are in place

Kanching Waterfalls (Left)
Broga Hills (Right)

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Snapshots

Forging strong ties By Eugene Tang



Outrigger Resorts UK's Julian Mills, Outrigger Resorts Thailand's Darren Edmonstone, Mark Simmons and Ken Scott, and Hills Balfour UK's Jonathan Sloan



Asia World Enterprise Thailand's Olga Kovshanova and Stephen McEvoy



LuxuryEscapes Australia's Paul Gorman and Outrigger Koh Samui Beach Beach Resort's Rory Campbell



SunTrips Thailand's Euam Akapatangkul, Apsara Beachfront Resort and Villa Thailand's Kantima Sanglee, Chatree Sanglee and Tiwat Sahglee, and Sunny Sunflower (Thailand)'s Thanan Laddakrom and Anchali Muttamara



Villa Hotels Maldives' Muaviyath Umar, Island Pearl Holidays Maldives' Hathim Hassan, Intour Maldives' Ali Firaq, Let's Go Maldives' Mohamed Riyaz and AAA Hotels & Resorts Maldives' Ahmed Hamza



eMarketingeye Sri Lanka's Uthpalie Thilakaratna, Plaza Premium Group Hong Kong's Pauline Cheung and Karen Cheung, and Jetway Express Hong Kong's Samuel Wong



Minor Hotel Group Thailand's Amr AlSoudani, Anantara Riverside Bangkok Resort's Kannika Phatthanathien, and Minor Hotel Group Thailand's Meg Evans and Michael Marshall



Wangchuk Group of Companies Bhutan's Chenchu Namgyel, Zhidhey Bhutan Tours & Treks' Jurmey Tshewang, Bhutan Dew Drop Travels' Tshering Yonten, Himalayan Travel Experts Bhutan's Tenzin Yeshe and Bhutan Nortor Adventures' Sonam Phuntsho



Rembrandt Hotel & Towers Bangkok's Kamolnuch Bhiromsawad and Eric Hallin



Bayan Tree Hotels & Resorts Germany's Marie-Sophie Sauer, and DSI Reisen Germany's Marlies Schmauch, Lars Hendrik Schmauch and Dieter Schmauch



Voyages Maldives' Viraj Silva, Crown & Champa Resorts Maldives' Nine Fleischmann-Torosyan and Thomas Cook Germany's Jens-Jochen Lauff

News/Snapshots

Tourism plays catch-up in India

India wants to attract 1% of global tourists, shores up support for tourism sector with a new draft policy

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

THE industry is set to receive a major impetus and play a stronger role in Indian national economy, if a new draft policy aimed at boosting tourism gets the nod from the national government.

Vinod Zutshi, secretary, ministry of tourism, government of India, told the *Daily*. "Upon Cabinet approval of the policy, tourism will for the first time be seen as the major engine for economic growth and (considered) a major factor in contributing to the national GDP."

The new tourism policy also aims to grow India's share in international tourist arrivals from the current 0.7 per cent to one per cent by 2020.

"We are working to improve

the infrastructure at many of our beach destinations, and also to build new amenities and facilities on the beaches for tourists," said Zutshi.



Tourism will for the first time be seen as the major engine for economic growth and (considered) a major factor in contributing to the national GDP.

Vinod Zutshi, secretary, ministry of tourism, government of India

The improved coastal infrastructure will lend a hand in enhancing India's niche tourism experiences, which include spiritual, wellness, wildlife and adventure packages.

To allay concerns surround-

seeks to assist foreign travellers who encounter problems in the country. It is available in 12 languages, including English, Hindi, Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

and standard operating procedure in place to prevent any misgivings or misinformation being reported."

Meanwhile, international buyers at ITB Berlin also appear unfazed by safety concerns surrounding Indian tourism.

Bert Stoot, owner of Holland-based NOL Travels, said: "There is a lot of interest into South India. I have been there so I am not too worried about safety because I see that it is perfectly fine there."

Oliver Drewes, owner of Holistika Spiritual Work & Travel in Germany, said: "We are keen to promote the bigger and more developed cities like Bangalore because it is a good starting point to introduce the Germans into India."

50 shades of gold for ASEAN @ 50

By Eugene Tang



Tourism Malaysia's Mirza Mohammad Taiyab



Ministry of Tourism & Sports Thailand's Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul and Tourism Authority of Thailand's Yuthasak Supasorn



Tourism Malaysia's Zainol Abidin Omar, Embassy of Brunei Darassalam Germany's Kelly Chan Chee Leong and Embassy of Malaysia Germany's Zulkifli Adnan



Maleka State Government's Idris Bin Hj Haron and Smart Malaysia Tourist Apps' Md. Salleh Huddin Abu Hanifah



Minister of Tourism and Culture Malaysia's Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz



American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute's Joseph McInerney and Singapore Tourism Board's Soo Siew Keong



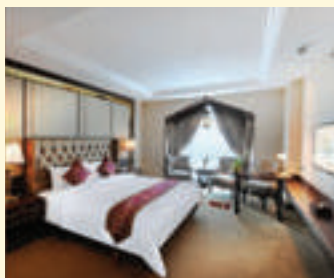
Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism Laos' Willy Hsieh and Saly Phimphith, Embassy of Laos Germany's Sithong Chitnoithinh and HTMS International Czech Republic's Mauro Lazzari



Ministry of Tourism Cambodia's So Mara

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