



Euro falls, Asia rises

Pricing strategy is key for Far East to gain from euro devaluation

By Raini Hamdi

GERMAN tour operators are predicting that the devaluation of the euro can turn the tide for Asia, especially if sellers play their cards right and are level-headed about pricing.

While the impact of the falling euro is not being felt yet, as the big tour operators have hedged the exchange rate and are able to sell their packages at the rate of last summer, pricing will be a big issue for 2016, they said.

Asia could seize the opportunity to grab back German tourist flow to the west – Caribbean, Mexico, Latin America – which has been going on since last year, they added.

“Latin America, for example, is running well but we feel it has reached its pricing limits and, with the US dollar being more expensive, it is getting more difficult to sell,” said Holger Baldus, managing director of Marco Polo Reisen.

“In this price-conscious market, (German travellers) may defer their trip there to two or three years later and shift to value-for-money countries.”

This could cause a flow back to destinations such as Vietnam, Thailand and Sri Lanka, said Baldus, pointing out that land costs for a similar tour in Vietnam are half that of Latin America, while airfares and connections are better to the Far East.

Michael Frese, CEO of DER Touristik, which operates DER-TOUR, Meier’s Weltreisen and ADAC-Reisen, said German tour operators, not just his company, have seen a tremendous increase to the west, possibly due to incidents such as the coup in Thailand and the MH accidents, aside from those destinations themselves being affordable.

“We all have seen big increases – 50 per cent or so – to the Dominican Republic, Cuba and even smaller places like St Lucia and Barbados. As well, the Indian Ocean – Sri Lanka, Seychelles and Mauritius. But this can easily change in the coming winter when the price relation between, say, Thailand and the Caribbean, then becomes much bigger (due to the devaluation).

“If hotels in Asia are not increasing rates too much, if the Asian destination has no or small inflation only, and if there are no big currency fluctuations – say the Thai baht falls against the euro – then there could be a shift (back to Asia),” said Frese.

For 2016, he said land prices would increase 10-15 per cent simply due to the falling euro. “Hopefully, hotels are taking this into consideration when

they make their pricing for Europe. Rates to faraway countries will become more expensive for winter 2015 onwards. Those who depend on the European market will probably be more careful (not to outprice themselves),” added Frese.

Asian Trails’ CEO, Laurent Kuenzle, said: “This year at ITB, it is all about price, price, price because of the euro devaluation.

“The message that is coming out from European tour operators is, because of the devaluation and the economy, which has not recovered to levels we want to see, the market is price sensitive and they want to have the same prices in euro as in last year.

“This means we have to work on tour options that match that kind of budget so that they can continue to sell the packages to their consumers.”

Ramada Plaza Bangkok Menam Riverside general manager, Klaus Sennik, said he would maintain his already competitive room rate, pointing out that Bangkok has 705 hotels and there are “all kinds of offers” everywhere in the city.

But he would lower his F&B prices at the hotel. “It can be unfair to a guest when he sees he has to pay 11 euros for a club sandwich because it’s now 34 baht to one euro compared to 50 baht before,” said Sennik.



Baldus: expect price-led shift



Kuenzle: price, price, price

TUI, Aitken Spence revive charters to Sri Lanka

By S Puvaneswary

CHARTER flights from the UK, Netherlands and Scandinavia to Sri Lanka are on the way as TUI and Sri Lanka’s Aitken Spence Travels renew old ties.

TUI and Aitken Spence have confirmed weekly charter flights for winter 2016, said Madubhani Perera, director/marketing at Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB).

Nalin Jayasundera, managing director of Aitken Spence Travels, said: “Aitken Spence Travels last worked with TUI more than a decade ago.

“Aitken Spence will provide these tourists with options for round-island tours, beach stays with excursions, or a combination of both.”

These charters are one of more upcoming flights to link Sri Lanka and Europe, as SLTPB yesterday started discussions with Lufthansa’s low-cost subsidiary, Eurowings, to commence twice-weekly charter flights from Cologne to Colombo in summer 2016, and with Austrian Airlines for scheduled

flights between the two countries beginning 1H16.

National flag carrier SriLankan Airlines will also start codesharing operations with AirBerlin for daily Berlin-Colombo flights from March 27, said Kaushal Seneviratne, regional manager for UK, Europe & North America of the airline.

“The European market is an important one for Sri Lanka as the average traveller spends 10-14 days in the destination, as compared with Asians who stay three-four days,” said Perera.

To further increase the length of stay, SLTPB is promoting new destinations on the east coast to Europe, including Trincomalee, Pasikudah, Nilaveli, Arugam Bay, and UNESCO World Heritage Site Sinharaja Forest Reserve.

It will also organise a roadshow to six major German cities in 2H15 to promote to consumers and trade alike. Germany is Sri Lanka’s second largest European market and welcomed 20 per cent more German tourists in 2014 than in the year before.

Kraft launches eins

GeoMedia Consulting managing director, Stefan Kraft, is back in the tour operating business with a new venture, eins Travel, focusing on premium wellness and health tours. He said there is a niche for it in Berlin, which lacks high-end operators specialising in the area. The company will begin operations

in April and Kraft is starting to negotiate rates with suppliers at this ITB, including those from the Far East.

German consumers will be making bookings with him mostly online, he said.



Kraft: new niche



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News/Snapshots

More visas on arrival soon

By Raini Hamdi

THE UNWTO aims to bring down to 50 per cent this year the percentage of the world's population requiring a traditional visa prior to travel, from 62 per cent last year.

UNWTO secretary-general Taleb Rifai told *the Daily* that this is a "realistic" aim, given that countries are now realising that technology can help ease visa facilitation, while there is real correlation between eased travel restrictions and increased number of jobs and economic growth.

The percentage of the world

population requiring a visa last year was already an improvement over 2008, when the figure was 77 per cent. Last year, 19 per cent of the world's population was able to enter a destination without a visa, while 16 per cent could receive a visa-on-arrival (VOA), compared with 17 per cent and six per cent in 2008.

"We're not saying 'abolish the visa'. We're saying why don't you do VOA or e-visas..."

If there are undesirable people, they can be stopped (with today's sophisticated technology), but don't stop people because they are 'unwanted' nationali-

ties, especially if these are such big markets, like Brazil, China or India," said Rifai.

UNWTO has launched a Visa Openness index to help governments ease visa facilitation. ASEAN was found to be the friendliest region, where only 12 per cent of the world's population requires a traditional visa prior to arrival.

"Any government which are now a bit more convinced that they need to look at their visa system can access our database."

"Sometimes it's just as simple as saying, can you please improve your website, make it more friendly and understandable," said Rifai.



Rifai: free movement

Finding new ground in emerging Europe

TO SUPPLEMENT declining arrivals from Western Europe, inbound travel agencies in Malaysia are turning to emerging markets on the continent.

Saini Vermeulen, head of international sales at Panorama Tours Malaysia, said the company is eyeing FIT and group travel from Hungary this year, especially during summer.

"If our venture in Hungary works well, we will extend it to include other similar markets like Poland."

Likewise, Wilson Chau from Discovery Overland Holidays in Kuala Lumpur is looking for more partners especially from Poland and the Czech Republic, markets he has been working for the last five years. Although these

markets constitute a small part of business, year-on-year growth was 15-20 per cent in 2014.

But Chau noted said that business from emerging markets is seasonal, favouring winter. Travellers prefer three- to four-star hotels and have an average spend smaller than that of their Western counterparts. — S Puvaneswary

Myanmar tourism unscathed by fighting

By Mimi Hudoyo

EUROPEAN fascination for Myanmar remains untouched, with tour operators attending ITB Berlin reporting growth in bookings for 2015 despite news of violence close to the Myanmar-China border.

Phyoe Wai Yar Zar, chairman of Myanmar Tourism Marketing, said there had been concerns among the trade if Myanmar was safe to visit, but there has been no impact on arrivals.

"Since the conflict on the north-eastern Chinese border, we have been sending updates that the location (of the fighting) is remote and the situation has been contained," he said, adding that a group of his clients had crossed into Myanmar from Yunnan without incident at the same time the violence was taking place.

Clashes between ethnic Koko rebels and government troops broke out in northern Shan state in early February.

But Myanmar tour operators say that business has continued to be positive, and the South-east Asian nation has brought 50 travel stakeholders to Berlin, its biggest delegation to date.

Zanaida Des Aubris, sales manager Europe, Myanmar Bavarian Travels and Tours, said: "We have seen growing demand to Myanmar from (German-speaking markets). At this

point, bookings for 2015 are up by 20 per cent over last year."

Customers have approached her with safety concerns, but there have been no cancellations or postponements so far.

Similarly, Thatoe Thuza-raung, director general of Authentic Myanmar Travel & Tours, reported stronger European interest. "We have come up with new special interest products, such as trekking in Kyaing Tong and southern Shan state (for Europeans)."



Phyoe Wai Yar Zar: business as usual

Glowing and growing

Bright smiles to welcome new friends and business partners, finds Eugene Tang



Pan Pacific Hotels Group Singapore's Donald Lim and Fabian Seet



Singapore Tourism Board (STB) India's Chee Pey Chang, STB Germany's Martina Denhard, Janice Yuen Lai Yap, Michaela Menzel, Karin Thönes and Brigitte U Fleischauser, and STB's Leong Yue Kheong



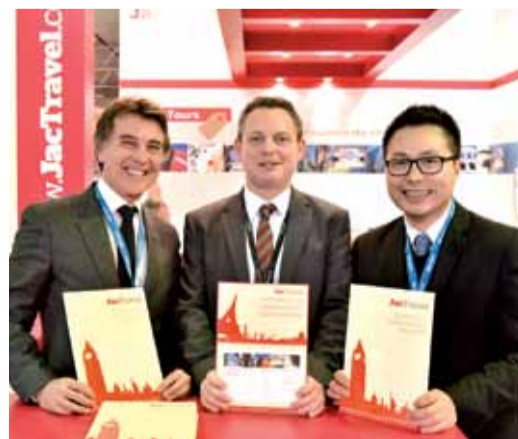
Onyx Hospitality Group Thailand's Peter Foster, Debrah Pascoe and Kullapranee Sawareephol



Design Hotels Singapore's Carsten Lima



China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) Germany's Xiang Shi and CNTA's Yaying Li



JacTravel UK's Mario Bodini, Malcolm Lindop and Abba Lee



China Travel International Sanya's Jerry Wang, Beyond Summits China's Maggie Zhang, Sanya Tourism Association's Guojiang Chen, Sanya Tourism Development Commission's Wang Feifei, Huayu Group Austria's Willi K Kollmann, Sanya Tourism Development Commission's Yuan Xiao Wei, Beyond Summits China's Isabella Hou and Huayu Group Austria's Renate Kollmann

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News/Snapshots

Hunting for new European feeders

Garuda hitches on Czech deal for new sources

By Mimi Hudoyo

GARUDA Indonesia has sealed a commercial cooperation agreement with Czech Airlines that will see the latter become a feeder source to its European hub in Amsterdam.

The agreement, signed on February 23, covers passenger codeshare, joint marketing and promotion, maintenance, repair and overhaul, and training.

Dian Ediono, general manager for continental Europe and Russia, Garuda Indonesia, said the codeshare turns the Czech Republic into a feeder market for Amsterdam and that the airline is seeking similar partnerships with airlines from countries neighbouring the Netherlands, though he was unable to disclose which ones.

"There are opportunities to develop other source markets now that we are a (premium) airline and flying the new Boeing 777-300ER (in three classes). We can cater to all segments – tourists and business travellers alike," said Dion.

Welcoming the move, Herman Rukmanadi, managing director of Bhara Tours, said that while direct flights from Europe would be the best scenario for tour operators, developing feeder markets through codeshares is "one step forward".

"Taking Garuda means a shorter

flight time to Jakarta, with good connections to domestic routes at a more economical price for travellers," he added.

But Rocky Praputranto, operations director of Panorama Destination, said: "I'm not sure what the extent of cooperation with Czech Airlines is, but what we actually need is a Garuda GSA in the Czech Republic that can push sales for the airline."

A ready market for Garuda's Amsterdam-Jakarta connection exists, as evidenced by the feeder markets using KLM flights, but the carrier must drum up awareness beyond the capital of the Netherlands, he said.

Garuda flies Jakarta-Amsterdam-London four times a week in the low season from January to March and five times weekly the rest of the year.

Dion said Garuda is aiming to make the service a daily one.

Marintour Indonesia's executive director, Ismail Ali, expected that Garuda's recruitment of feeder markets would not dilute the potential of the sizeable Dutch market.

"Our partner (in the Netherlands) uses Garuda a lot and we receive groups and FITs flying Garuda every week," he said. "What Garuda needs is to work with preferred tour operators there to continue developing business from the Netherlands."



SWITCH ON TO GOASEAN

The message of South-east Asian tourism officials (above) could not have been clearer at yesterday's launch of GOASEAN, a 24-hour TV channel that will showcase the best of the region's tourism. GOASEAN will roll out this June in Malaysia and globally by 2017.

BKK Air seeks partners

BANGKOK Airways is looking for more airlines to partner in codeshare and interline agreements to increase the accessibility of its Koh Samui hub and attract more European passengers.

Puttipong Prasarttong-Osoth, president, Bangkok Airways, said European and Middle Eastern carriers that fly into Kuala Lumpur and Singapore are of specific interest as his airline could provide an onward connection to Koh Samui, its second hub after Bangkok.

By mid-2015, Bangkok Airways will sign a codeshare agreement with Austrian Airlines, the seventh European airline it has such an arrangement with, said Peter Wiesner, senior vice president,

network management. Europeans already form the largest share of Bangkok Airways' overseas passengers at 40 per cent, versus the 34.1 per cent share for North Asian and South-east Asian passengers.

For this summer season, Bangkok Airways will raise flight frequencies on the Koh Samui-Singapore route from daily to 10 times weekly, and Koh Samui-Kuala Lumpur from daily to 11 times weekly.

Meanwhile, it will start a new direct service linking Chiang Mai and Mandalay, as well as new domestic flights from Chiang Mai to Phuket and Udon Thani. – S Puvaneswary

Thumbs up for a good show

Eugene Tang checks in with exhibitors who are absolutely raring to go on Day 2 of ITB



Taipei Tourism Office Germany's Johnson Wang (fifth from left) and his team roaring into ITB



Plaza Premium Lounge Hong Kong's Pauline Cheung, Siew Kiat Wang and Jonathan Song, Crewe Associates Paris' Jean-Claude Baumgarten, and Plaza Premium Lounge Hong Kong's Linda Song

Hedaco Travel & Tours Malaysia's Esmadee Endut, Terengganu Tourism's Zaihan Cheku Abd Rahman and Wan Mohd Firdaus Wan Sembak



Outrigger Resorts' Ken Scott, Mark Simmons and Anabela Dos Santos, and Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort's Rory Campbell



The Garden Hotel, Guangzhou's Franco Io



Osaka Government Tourism Bureau's Nana Kurauchi and Tetsuya Nakamura

Medical tourism

Seeing the doctor

As health and wellness tourism becomes a rising trend worldwide, what are the region's players doing to grab a slice of this lucrative market?

By [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#), [Greg Lowe](#), [S Puvaneswary](#) and [Mimi Hudoyo](#)

SINGAPORE - KEEPING THE GLOW

The Lion City is a bright point in South-east Asia's medical tourism scene but complacency could see that position under threat from developing neighbours.

A Health Outcomes and Spending Index by The Economist Intelligence Unit – which weighs population health against healthcare spending in 166 countries – placed

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Medical tourism

Singapore second internationally, coming after Japan.

However, Beng Teck Liang, CEO of Singapore Medical Group (SMG), said: "The key challenge with medical tourism is (developing) markets are catching up with Singapore in standards and quality of healthcare. It could be a matter of five to 10 years. For Singapore to remain the preferred choice for medical tourism, we have to innovate to stay ahead in the industry."

"Complex diagnosis that are surgical and oncology related have higher proportions of medical tourists," he observed, but added that SMG is seeing a gradual increase in tourists seeking cosmetic and aesthetic treatments.

Likewise, Raffles Hospital deputy director for hospital marketing, Foo Min Meng, said: "Developing countries

are increasing healthcare spending, giving patients more reasons to remain in their country for simple medical procedures."

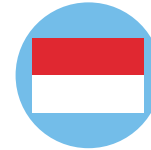
He also said that the lack of nurses and doctors continues to affect healthcare organisations globally. "Even if healthcare organisations would like to grow business at a faster rate, we are constrained by the availability of manpower." Foreigners make up 30 per cent of the hospital's patient numbers.

The bulk of the foreigners seeking healthcare services in Singapore in 2011 are Indonesians and Malaysians respectively, with growing numbers emerging from Bangladesh, Vietnam and Myanmar.



S\$832 million (US\$632.2 million) in medical tourism receipts in 2013

10,756 hospital beds in Singapore's 25 hospitals and speciality centres in 2012



Indonesia is the top source market for medical tourism in 2014

THAILAND - A LONG-STANDING PROPONENT

A leading medical tourism hub in the region, Thailand attracts more than 2.5 million health and wellness travellers to generate 140 billion baht (US\$4.3 billion) a year.

Japan remains Thailand's top source market for medical tourists, followed by the US, the UK, the GCC and Australia, according to the most recent official statistics published in 2013, although the US and UK have moved up the leaderboard ahead of the Middle East over the past few years.

It is not hard to see how Thailand, already known for its attentive service and hospitality standards, reigns in this market. The kingdom currently has 37 hospitals accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI) certification, and Bumrungrad International Hospital was ranked among the world's best hospitals in 2014 by the Medical Travel Quality Alliance.

Wellness is also a core growth area for Thailand's tourism. The country has a large spa and wellness sectors, which forms the backbone of the alternative health segment. About 80 per cent of guests are foreign tourists. With some 1,400 spas, and an annual sectoral growth of five to six per cent, the Tourism Authority of Thailand

(TAT) anticipates this market segment will grow from contributing 16 billion baht a year to as much as 50 billion within the next five years.

A TAT study has revealed that patients stay up to three days for dermatology treatments and medical check-ups, three weeks for plastic surgery, and from one to six months for more extensive medical treatments.

Meanwhile, travellers visiting the kingdom for plastic surgery spend about 130,000 baht per person, with the treatment accounting for 40 per cent of expenditure. Those coming for dermatology treatments over the weekend, especially from Hong Kong and Singapore, spend about 20,000 baht to 35,000 baht.

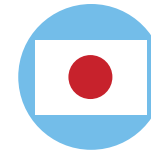
To seize the opportunities presented by the sector, TAT has rolled out a number of strategies to promote the health and wellness market under its *2015 Discover Thainess* campaign. The NTO plans to strengthen the country's positioning as the rehabilitation destination of choice for the Middle Easterners; rehabilitation, wellness and beauty treatments for the European market, medical check-ups, beauty treatments and dental work for Asians; and wellness and medical check-ups for visitors from the US.

However, intense competition from other countries presents a key challenge. Thailand, Singapore and India account for 90 per cent of Asia's medical tourism market, according to MyMedHoliday.com. While that builds the region's overall appeal within the global market, it also increases competition within Asia.



130,000 baht (US\$3,950) was the estimated average spent on plastic surgery in 2012

37 JCI-accredited hospitals are available in Thailand, the highest in Asia



Japan was the top source market for medical tourists in 2013

MALAYSIA - MORE PROMOTION NEEDED

Eager to attract medical tourists, Malaysia has been ramping up its infrastructure in pursuit of this segment.

The Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) has introduced concierge and lounge services at the Kuala Lumpur and Penang international airports in the last two years. The service is integrated with the MHTC Careline, a hotline medical tourists can use for enquiries and assistance with appointment booking.

Healthcare service provider Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care is also set to open Mediplex at its Subang Jaya Medical Centre in Selangor state in February 2015. As the country's first purpose-built healthcare and retail complex, it will offer preventive medicine and cosmetic procedures and, by 2016, feature accommodation for outpatient and foreign patients.

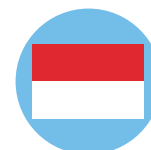
However, despite the greater attention given to the medical tourism segment, Malaysia continues to suffer

from a lack of recognition among potential customers.

Azizan Noordin, Tourism Malaysia deputy director-general (promotion), said one challenge is the lack of awareness internationally of Malaysia's medical facilities. The NTO thus regularly invites overseas hospital administrators, travel consultants and media for fam trips.

Rafeah Ariffin, senior general manager, group marketing & corporate communications at KPJ Healthcare, said: "The government should do more to promote Malaysia as a medical tourism destination as awareness is lacking in this area."

Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care's director, strategic marketing, branding & communications – Malaysia, Edgar Toral, added: "Another challenge is competition from countries that have been in this space longer than Malaysia, (plus) the delay in getting visa renewals for medical tourists who require follow-up treatments."



Indonesia is the top market for 2014

770,134 healthcare travellers visited Malaysia in 2013



RM690.2 million (US\$193 million) in medical tourism receipts in 2013

INDONESIA - MORE OUTFLOW THAN INFLOW

Better known as a source of healthcare travellers, Indonesia is just beginning to invest in its medical tourism sector.

The Ministry of Tourism has identified 16 target markets for this niche, including Singapore, Malaysia and Australia as primary sources.

However, Fitriana Dosun, head of marketing, BIMC Siloam Hospitals Group Bali, said the medical tourism sector in Indonesia is "nascent" compared with neighbouring Thailand and Malaysia.

BIMC Hospital Nusa Dua, part of BIMC Siloam Hospitals Group, receives online enquiries daily from international markets. "But it's our close proximity to Australia, a country well known for high medical costs and long waiting periods for treatments, that is our biggest market, especially since we have invested in Australian Council on Healthcare Standards accreditation,"

said Fitriana.

The hospital is also equipped with an Australian-standard surgical theatre and has "laid the initial groundwork with our Australian counterparts to bring Australian plastic surgeons to Bali with their patients". It is also offering plastic surgery by leading Indonesian surgeons at a more affordable price.

Indonesia could also leverage its strength in wellness. "Bali will become a destination for surgery and convalescence at any of its after-care resorts," said Fitriana.

However, few hospitals in Indonesia understand and are investing in medical tourism, noted Akhyaruddin, director of MICE and special interest tourism development, directorate general of destination development, Ministry of Tourism.

Akhyaruddin also highlighted the lack of a hospital-ity mindset among doctors in Indonesia, where patients have to wait for a long time to receive treatment.



US\$232.80 was spent per visit per traveller in 2013

0.2% of tourists visited Indonesia in 2013 for health and wellness tourism



Australia is the top-spending health and wellness market for Indonesia, spending US\$815 per visit in 2013

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Destination Malaysia

Well prepared for the numbers

Malaysia is hopeful of luring more German tourists on the back of lower airfares and immersive tours. By S Puvaneswary



German tourists to Malaysia are showing a keener interest in exploring cultural experiences

With Lufthansa's launch of five-times weekly Frankfurt-Kuala Lumpur services since March 2014 on a route previously monopolised by Malaysia Airlines (MAS), it comes as no surprise that German arrivals to Malaysia rose 19.7 per cent to 106,624 in the first eight months of 2014, compared with 89,099 in the same period in 2013.

The increased capacity has led to greater competition on the Frankfurt-Kuala Lumpur route, which in turn has helped to reduce airfares and contributed to a spike in German business in 2013, said Yap Sook Ling, managing director of Asian Overland Services (AOS) Tours & Travel.

Ganneesh Ramaa, manager of Luxury Tours Malaysia, believes that Lufthansa's strength in its Eastern European network is also a pull factor.

He commented: "It will also help attract travellers from East European countries to travel to Malaysia via Frankfurt. This is a big advantage as there is limited connectivity to South-east Asia from Eastern Europe."

According to Tourism Malaysia deputy director-general (promotion), Azizan Noordin, many of the signature events held in conjunction with the *Malaysia Year of Festivals 2015* will appeal to the German-speaking markets.

Tourism Malaysia will leverage the campaign by conducting tactical advertising through various media platforms, as well as organising familiarisation trips for the trade and media to have first-

hand experience of the events, which include Rainforest World Music Festival, Malaysia Mask Festival and Aborigine Festival.

He added that the NTO will promote the east coast of West Malaysia and the states of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia to this market.

Travel operators in Malaysia are also seeing a greater German interest in the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia.

Arokia Das, senior manager of Luxury Tours Malaysia, said his company will be introducing a seven-night package this year to the east coast, covering Kota Bharu, Kuala Terengganu and Kuantan, as well as a beach stay at Perhentian or Redang Islands, both off the coast of Terengganu.

He explained: "The package provides authentic village experiences which the German-speaking markets are very keen on. They like to try local food and see how local handicrafts such as kites, batik and traditional boats are made. These, as well as catching squid together with local fishermen, will be incorporated into the itinerary."

Said Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours CEO, Alex Lee, who has observed a growing interest among the German-speaking tourists in the Malay culture of the peninsular east coast: "For years, we have been trying to promote the Malay culture in the east coast and we are now seeing the fruits of our labour. German-speaking tourists used to be interested (only) in the colonial history and Peranakan culture of West Malaysia.

"This year we have developed over 30 cultural products in the east coast for this market. We are focusing on traditional music and dance. We have seen forward bookings for summer from as early as January, which is quite unusual."

Lee, who is also CEO of Terrapuri Heritage Village resort in Penarik, Terengganu, expects forward bookings for this summer from the German-speaking market to double from the previous year.

He added: "I think the depreciation of the ringgit as well as promotions by Tourism Malaysia have contributed to (growing) interest in the destination."

Likewise, Nathan Vaithi, general manager of Mutiara Taman Negara National Park Resort, anticipates at least a year-on-year increase of 10 per cent from the German-speaking markets.

The 103-room resort, which completed a revamp in May 2014, had last year invited bloggers and magazine writers from Germany to experience its offerings and is thus expecting to reap stronger German interest from the coverage.

Andy Yow, director of sales and marketing at Vivanta by Taj - Rebak Island Langkawi that was rebranded from Resort Island Resort Langkawi last May, is also optimistic that this year will bring more German arrivals.

He said: "Contracted rates have been maintained over the last four years. At US\$200 nett per room per night, this private resort is now more affordable considering the recent depreciation of the ringgit."

Destination in numbers

29.4 million

Tourism Malaysia's total arrivals target for 2015, five per cent higher than 2014

9.8

The average length of stay (number of nights) of both German and Swiss tourists to Malaysia in 2013, a slight drop from 10.3 and 10 nights respectively in 2012

US\$94.90

The average daily expenditure of German tourists to Malaysia in 2013, up from US\$82.55 in 2012; expenditure of Swiss tourists also rose from US\$81.07 in 2012 to US\$88.11 in 2013

62.6%

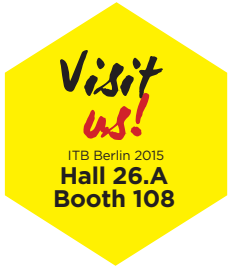
The average occupancy rate of hotels in Malaysia in 2013, compared with 62.4 per cent in 2012

209,527

The total number of rooms across 3,094 hotels in Malaysia in 2013, a 7.2 per cent year-on-year rise from 195,445 rooms and 2,274 hotels in 2012

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Macau - What a Thrill!



Buzzing with glamorous new hotels, thrilling entertainment and shopping and dining delights, Macau is reinventing itself as a multifaceted destination with all-round appeal. 2015 will see the arrival of some of the world's most prestigious hotels and attractions.

2015 looks set to be another exciting year for Macau with a strong line-up of activities and openings of new hotels and attractions.

More hotels

There are now more choices than ever. Government figures indicated a supply of 28,892 rooms with an average occupancy rate of 86% in 2014. 46 projects are on the drawing board, which will supply an estimated 25,600 rooms. Soon to be completed include Harbourview Hotel (444 rooms), Crowne Plaza Macau (208 rooms), The Ritz-Carlton (251 rooms), JW Marriott (1,015 rooms), Broadway Hotel (320 rooms), St Regis Hotel (400 rooms), Legend Palace Hotel (229 rooms), Hollywood Roosevelt Macau (373 rooms), Studio City (1,600 rooms), and The Parisian Macao (3,000 rooms).

Leisure and entertainment

Macau's determined diversification plan has paid off. Its success in developing sub-sectors such as business events, family entertainment, shopping and culture and heritage means that everyone from vacationing families to the convention participants now have plenty of excellent-value options.



Senado Square, part of "The Historic Center of Macau", a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Hollywood-inspired next-generation destination resort Studio City will open in mid-2015, promising visitors movie-star treatment at its glamorous hotels and all shopping, dining and entertainment venues. Studio City will be home to a new Macau icon and Asia's highest ferris wheel – Golden Eye – as well as DC Comics' Batman Dark Flight, the world's first Batman film franchise ride. Its shopping mall The Boulevard is designed like a movie-studio.

Also set to open in 2015 are Galaxy Entertainment Groups' two major projects – Phase II of its flagship integrated resort Galaxy Macau and its new entertainment district called The Broadway.

All these new attractions will complement "The Historic Centre of Macau", a UNESCO World Heritage Site and evergreen visitors' favourite. Walking tours from the Macau Government Tourist Office lead visitors to lesser-known quarters to discover Macau's rich East-meets-West history, nature, arts and culture.

Popular entertainment in Macau now include Vegas-style live performances, sports, concerts, exhibitions and the DreamWorks Experience at Sands Cotai Central.

Business meetings

Macau's world-class MICE facilities and venues are now capable of accommodating even very large groups. The Cotai Arena at The Venetian Macao successfully hosted the 8,700-delegate Tupperware convention in 2014. Galaxy Macau's 2015 expansion will boost its own capacity to 3,000 for meetings, incentives and banquets.

Better access

Access is now easier than ever, via land, sea and air. Macau International Airport is connected to 35 destinations in Mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam. Passenger numbers rose 11 per cent year-on-year in 2014. Visitors also have the option of flying into Hong Kong, which has connections to the world's major cities, then hop right on to a ferry at the airport's Sky Pier and be in Macau in an hour.

There are also frequent ferry services from Hong Kong, such as the high-speed TurboJet service which operates 24-hours a day. Macau itself is very compact – nowhere is more than half an hour away! Sightseeing spots abound and travel is a breeze.

Citizens from 75 countries now enjoy visa-free travel to Macau.



Hang out with Shrek and the DreamWorks Gang!



Opening soon: Studio City



The Galaxy Macau

Major upcoming events

- Macau Arts Festival May-June 2015
- Macau Lotus Flower Festival June 2015
- Dragon Boat Festival June 2015
- Macau International Fireworks Display Contest September 5-October 1, 2015
- Macau International Music Festival October-November 2015
- Macau Food Festival November 2015
- Macau Grand Prix November 19-22, 2015



Macau – compact and accessible



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Destination Malaysia

WHAT'S NEW

1 Malaysia Year of Festivals 2015

The *Malaysia Year of Festivals 2015 (MyFest 2015)* campaign will complement the country's aims of attracting 36 million tourist arrivals and RM168 billion (US\$46.2 million) in tourist receipts in 2020 under the Malaysia Tourism Transformation Plan.

Themed *Endless Celebrations*, the year-long calendar offers more than 200 events related to cultural festivals, arts and music showcases, food promotions, shopping and sports. These events include the Mah-Meri Festival and Formula One Festival, both in March; Penang World Music Festival in April; Magic of the Night in May; Rainforest World Music Festival in August; Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix in October; and Malaysia Year End Sale in November and December.

2 Penang hop-on hop-off city tour

Introduced in November 2014, the Penang hop-on hop-off city tour is operated on open-top, double-decker buses plying two routes – Teluk Bahang-Persiaran Gurney, known as the beach route; and Persiaran Gurney-Penang Hill, known as the city route, covering a total of 60 attractions and 33 designated stops.

Passengers can stay for the full tour or alight at any of the stops. Each bus will have a driver accompanied by a tour assistant, and tourists will be given a guide book highlighting attractions, shopping, accommodation and food/drinks options within walking distance from the bus stops. Bus services run from 09.00 to 20.00 daily.

3 New World Petaling Jaya Hotel

New World Hotels & Resorts has been appointed by WCT Holdings to manage New World Petaling Jaya Hotel, scheduled to open in 3Q2016.

The hotel will occupy the top 12 floors of a dual-use tower that also includes The Azure residences.

The property will feature 316 guest

rooms and suites with the brand's signature Residence Club Living Room offering exclusive benefits such as complimentary breakfast, all-day refreshments and dedicated concierge service for Residence Club and hotel suite guests.

Besides a restaurant and rooftop bar, the hotel also offers an outdoor rooftop pool and gym, plus 2,000m² of meeting and event space including a ballroom accommodating up to 1,000 guests and eight meeting rooms.

4 British Airways resumes daily flights to Kuala Lumpur

British Airways will resume direct daily flights between London and Kuala Lumpur from May 27, 2015, after suspending services to the Malaysian capital in 2001 as global travel slowed after the 9/11 incident.

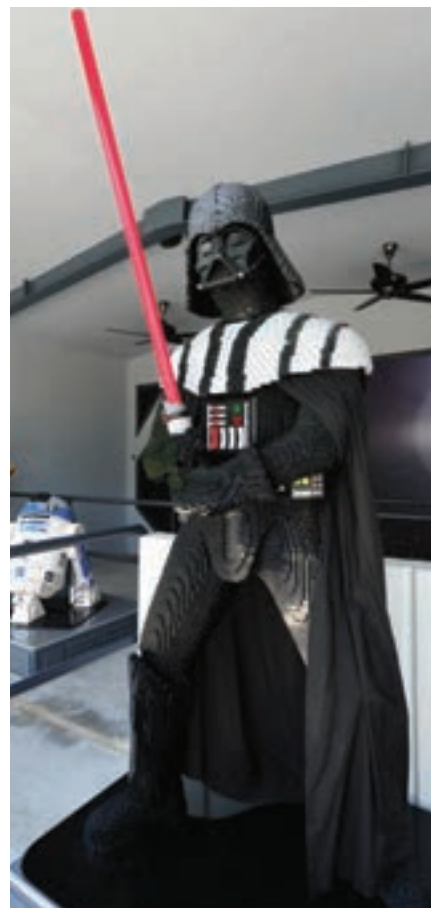
Once services resume, British Airways will arrive at and depart from London's Heathrow Terminal 5. The service will be operated on a Boeing B777-200ER, increasing capacity by 219 seats on each sector daily.

The London-Kuala Lumpur route is currently monopolised by Malaysia Airlines, which flies twice daily on this sector using a 500-seat Airbus A380.

5 Lego Star Wars Miniland Model Display at Legoland Malaysia

The Lego Star Wars Miniland Model Display was launched at Legoland Malaysia Resort in September 2014. Featuring more than 2,000 Lego models built to a 1:20 scale using 1.5 million Lego bricks, the attraction showcases seven scenes from the six *Star Wars* films and *The Clone Wars* animated series in detail.

The model display also features authentic *Star Wars* sounds, actions and lighting effects to create a realistic and enjoyable experience. All the models for this project were built in various locations including Malaysia, Germany and Czech Republic.



From left: New World Petaling Jaya Hotel; a life-sized Lego statue of Darth Vader on display at Legoland Malaysia

VIEWPOINTS

What are your business prospects for 2015?

Andrea Lee, area director - Kuala Lumpur, Destination Asia (Malaysia)

It is looking positive for our various business streams. The development of the cruise industry in Asia, inclusive of the ports in Malaysia, and the aggressive push by the various NTOs in ASEAN, is bound to attract more cruise liners, especially during the winter season.

The slowly spurring US and UK economies with continued downward trend of unemployment rates are opening up opportunities for outbound travel, even to the Far East. Australia and, to an extent, New Zealand continue to be strong for us as important inbound incentive travel and corporate meeting (markets).



KL Tan, general manager, Borneo Trails Tours & Travel

As we compete regionally with other destinations, it will be a very challenging year due to the implementation of the goods and services tax by the government starting April 1, 2015 and the complete removal of fuel subsidy for diesel and RON95 fuel in November 2014. Both these factors will make the price of our tour packages more expensive – we are looking at an increase of between three and five per cent.

HOW TO SELL



From top: The Datai Langkawi; Nam Restaurant

DO Play golf at **Els Club Teluk Datai**, an 18-hole championship golf course that opened in May 2014 as the newest golf course in Malaysia. A significant feature of this venue is its location amongst spectacular landscapes, from the lush backdrop of the rainforest nestled against the Machincang Mountain range to the turquoise waters of the Andaman Sea. Open to The Datai Langkawi guests as well as for public play at a daily fee, the club also has golf packages available for guests playing multiple rounds of golf through its relationships with various hotels in Langkawi.

SEE Catch a show at the **6D CineMotion** at Langkawi's Oriental Village, which elevates the movie-going experience to greater heights. Viewers sit on 5D special effect chairs that can rock from side to side and tip upwards or downwards in line with the story. Being part of the movie means that the audience will feel raindrops and gusts of wind as the movie progresses.

EAT **Nam Restaurant** serves creative and authentic meals infused with local and imported ingredients to provide a distinctive flair and unique dining experience in Langkawi. It also offers guests great views of Langkawi's expansive wetlands and mountain ranges at sunset, accompanied by vistas of water buffaloes cooling off in the evening breeze and migratory birds swooping down onto the lagoon's waters.

STAY Whether situated in the main building overlooking the Datai Bay, enveloped by lush rainforest foliage or set directly on a tranquil beach by the Andaman Sea, each of **The Datai Langkawi's** 125 luxurious villas, suites and rooms has its own charm and distinct atmosphere. This hotel is home to six dining outlets, an award-winning spa and the Els Club Teluk Datai golf course. Private lessons for intermediate and advanced golfers are available for guests, while beginners can join a complimentary class.

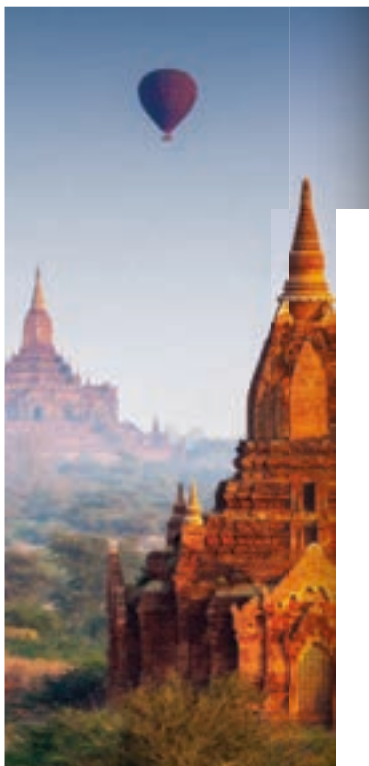
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Destination Thailand

A mature market stays strong

Tourists from resilient German-speaking markets are hitting lesser-known beach destinations, writes **Greg Lowe**

Southern Thailand, including Phang Nga National Park (pictured), enjoys immense popularity among German-speaking visitors



persimj1982/123RF.com

German-speaking markets proved relatively resilient to Thailand's political crises last year. Arrivals from the cluster declined by 2.4 per cent from the previous year, compared with the overall 6.7 per cent drop in international visitors, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

Of the 1.1 million visitors from those markets, 717,631 were from Germany, 200,649 from Switzerland and 100,504 from Austria. Looking forward, TAT governor Thawatchai Arunyik said the cluster should grow at the same rate as the rest of Europe this year.

"TAT expects the number of travellers from Europe to increase by six per cent in 2015 and revenue to grow by nine per cent," he said. "For the German-speaking market, TAT predicts that the number of visitors from Germany and Switzerland

will grow by five per cent and revenue by eight per cent. The Austrian market is expected to increase by seven per cent in terms of visitor numbers and nine per cent in terms of revenue."

Thailand will need all the help it can get in driving recovery this year. While the overall market has picked up, the collapse of the rouble has seen plummeting arrivals from Russia – the third largest source market by volume after China and Malaysia. This makes it all the more important to win back visitors from affluent European markets, who on average tend to stay longer and spend more.

Travel companies specialising in those markets remain relatively upbeat about last year's performance, in what proved to be a difficult year all round. While they expect business to improve, political undercurrents and the fact that the country remains under martial law since last May's

military coup still cause problems for the trade.

Tobias Fischer, director of business development at Go Vacation Thailand, said the company received some 150,000 German-speaking visitors last year, who stayed an average of 12 days and opted for a mix of city stop overs, cultural round trips and beach extensions.

"The pick-up of bookings for the winter season usually starts in the beginning of September," he said. "However, we could feel the hesitation after the political unrest in Thailand. The bookings for the winter season only came in big in the second half of October."

"Luckily by the end of the year we were able again to come close to 2013. 1Q2015 year-to-date looks good."

Diethelm Travel Group, which also has strong trade from German-speaking countries, reported closing 2014 with a

Destination in numbers

1 million

The number of arrivals from German-speaking markets in 2014, down 2.4 per cent year-on-year

717,631

The number of arrivals from Germany in 2014

200,649

The number of arrivals from Switzerland in 2014

100,504

The number of arrivals from Austria in 2014

28 million

The number of international arrivals targeted by Tourism Authority of Thailand in 2015

performance close to 2013's.

Nataly Wanhoff, a key account director at Diethelm, said most of the company's Germanic clients head to southern Thailand, the Andaman Sea and its islands.

In terms of trends, Phuket has started to lose its lustre with German-speaking markets to the benefit of Khao Lak, about an hour's drive north of the island. Customers are also becoming more adventurous and signing up for walking, cycling and kayak tours, as well as showing more interest in responsible tourism products.

"If all stays 'good' (in terms of Thailand's political stability) we should see an increase again in 2015," she said. "Marketing campaigns with attractive offers throughout the year for various regions of Thailand are planned also for 2015, as were done in 2014."

"German-speaking countries still have a lot of repeat visitors to Thailand. They expect stability, safety and good, reliable standards. The current martial law is still a hindrance for families and first-time visitors who are deciding whether to come to Thailand."

Given the high return rate of tourists from Europe, specialists are also marketing lesser-known destinations to attract repeat visitors.

While TAT has no specific strategies targeting German-speaking markets, beyond its broad-based 2015 *Discover Thainess* campaign, the NTO is confident its overall strategy that focuses on emerging destinations will resonate with those markets.

"Top destinations continue to be Bangkok, Phuket, Krabi, Phang Nga, Pattaya, Chiang Mai and Koh Samui," said Thawatchai.

"Through TAT's aggressive push, secondary and new destinations such as Koh Chang and Koh Kut, have started to welcome more tourists from German-speaking markets."

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Destination Thailand

WHAT'S NEW



Clockwise from above: Pullman Khao Lak Katiliya Resort and Villas; Namsaah Bottling Trust; Cartoon Network Amazone



1 Water parks make a splash

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

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

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

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

2 New boutique hotels at Khao Yai

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

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

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

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

3 Bangkok's fine dining scene

Last year marked the opening of a number of world-class restaurants in the Thai capital. Pepina, the sister of the popular Roman-style Appia, has opened to offer Neapolitan-style pizzas.

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

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

4 Shopping galore in Thailand

Thailand's luxury retail market

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

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

5 Pullman Khao Lak Katiliya Resort and Villas

Located on a 600m stretch of private beach, just an hour's drive from Phuket International Airport, Pullman Khao Lak Katiliya Resort and Villas consists of 223 rooms and suites and 97 villas.

The resort is home to six restaurants, which include Italian, Thai, Indian, Japanese and Korean cuisine options, as well as two bars.

Leisure facilities span five swimming pools, a spa, two fitness centres and a kids' club, plus a dedicated lifestyle team on call to facilitate a wide array of leisure activities available on site.

Meeting facilities include the 400m² Chong Fa Ballroom, which can accommodate up to 1,000 guests, and three medium-size function rooms.

VIEWPOINTS

What are your business prospects for 2015?

Philip Wigglesworth, business development director, Destination Asia Thailand

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



Willem Niemeijer, CEO, Khiri Group

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



HOW TO SELL

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

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

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

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



L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon

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Stephanie Ye, Assistant Marketing Manager
Participant of IT&CM China's Corporate Travel Roundtable

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The dragon gives chase

Industry players are calling for China to intensify marketing and branding efforts to grow the small German market. By **Li Xu**



Guilin's dramatic karst landscape is a key draw for German visitors to China

Despite the general decline in inbound tourism to China since 2010, the German market nevertheless managed a 0.4 per cent growth for the first 11 months of 2014 to reach 608,200 visitors, according to China National Tourism Administration (CNTA).

Its rank as China's second-largest European source market following Russia notwithstanding, Germany accounted for only 0.5 per cent of the market share; in comparison, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan together represented 79.5 per cent.

"We welcomed 2,379 guests from Germany, Switzerland and Austria in 2014, 50 per cent more than in 2013," said Lissy Xu, market manager for Germany, China Highlights.

With a dedicated German-speaking team for the market since 2002, the Guilin-based company receives mostly FIT tourists directly through its website, which is in both English and German language.

Xu shared: "Only five per cent of the guests booked with us through their local travel agencies last year. We had very limited success partnering European tour agencies through tradeshow like ITB Berlin and WTM. We figure ongoing social media marketing and direct communications with our customers are more important for our business development."

Nevertheless, Xu is confident of growth from the German market for 2015, with an upcoming project for some 120 outdoor enthusiasts from Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium to experience China's offerings during their participation in the 2015 Chengdu IVV Olympiad.

Several inbound tour operators told the *Daily* that classic itineraries covering Beijing, Xi'an, Shanghai and Guilin are still the most popular among German-speaking tourists.

"Most of our customers choose regular tours combining cultural experiences and nature exploration," said Lois Li, marketing manager, Odyssey Tours, highlighting the Great Wall, Terracotta Warriors and Guilin's Li River as the hottest attractions.

Suzhou's classic gardens and the Great Wall topped China's attractions according to German residents' Google search during 2008 to 2013, in a study conducted by Peking University Center for Recreation and Tourism Research (CRTR).

However, Cheryl Tseng, lead researcher of the CRTR study, opined that China is losing its attractiveness, as "a lot of tourist attractions are similar to one another and there is a lack of quality facilities", along with high admission fees at some tourist attractions.

She added: "Attraction managers need to consider generating revenue beyond admissions. Restaurants, hotels and souvenir stores need to accommodate Western tourists' needs."

The gradual renminbi appreciation and depreciation of certain currencies like the Japanese yen also contributed to the negative performance of China inbound tourism. Odyssey Tours' Li observed the tightening budgets among her clients, plus cancellations and switching of destinations.

Meanwhile, trade players and the academia have been calling for more marketing and branding efforts for the country. CRTR's study suggests that provincial DMCs lead the online presence improvement utilising big data collected specially from Germany, while Chuangxin Li, inbound tourism expert at China Tourism Academy, notes that a better national brand is needed to change the German media's passiveness towards China.

However, a tourism marketing plan is still missing from CNTA's agenda for 2015. With a stronger domestic focus, CNTA merely targets a maintenance of international arrival numbers and hopes the new tax refund scheme would encourage higher tourist spending on shopping.

Destination in numbers

22.8%

The growth of Germany inbound figures to China in 2013 compared with 2008

33.9%

The percentage of leisure visitors from January to September 2014, comprising a third of total inbound numbers to China and a further decline from 38.5% in 2013

66.2%

The occupancy rate in China as of November 2014, according to STR Global

147,991

The number of rooms under contract in China, representing 27.1% of the total share in Asia-Pacific, as of November 2014, according to STR Global

VIEWPOINTS

What are your business prospects for 2015?

Lissy Xu, market manager for Germany, China Highlights

Our no-shopping policy will be extended from English-speaking markets to German markets this year to ensure high quality, best value and no hidden traps for our customers. We will continue investing in the European market. The number of European customers is expected to rise 30 to 50 per cent in 2015.



Lois Li, marketing manager, Odyssey Tours

There has been an increasing demand in adventure travel for the European market; French and German travellers have shown great interest in nature and ethnic culture. To be more competitive in the current gloomy inbound market, we (will) do our best to maximise our customers' experiences.



HOW TO SELL

DO **The 14th IVV (Internationaler Volkssportverband) Olympiad** will be held in Chengdu in September. This Germany-originated sport-for-all event will offer a unique outdoor exercise experience in Chengdu's finest wetlands and Lohas Green Road. Combining the trip with visits to the capital Beijing or the historical Xi'an adds cultural immersion.

SEE Without visiting **Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding**, a trip to Chengdu is never complete. The base is more than a zoo, as it also tries to help pandas adapt to the natural habitat. Autumn and winter are the seasons to see newborns in the nursery.

STAY **The St Regis Chengdu** opened in end-2014, strategically located within steps of Tianfu Square and Chunxi Road and featuring its signature 24/7 butler services for all guests. With 12 more new upscale hotels totalling 3,342 rooms this year in

Chengdu, price competition in the city will benefit tourists.

EAT Foodies can visit a teahouse in Chengdu, drinking tea, snacking and chatting like the laid-back locals. **Shunxing Ancient Teahouse** also offers a great Sichuan opera performance.



WHAT'S NEW

1 China broadens tourist tax refund scheme

China's Ministry of Finance has launched a nationwide tourist tax refund scheme for overseas visitors, expanding the programme from just Hainan province where it was first introduced in 2011.

Foreigners as well as visitors from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan who have lived in the mainland for no more than 183 days are eligible to claim a tax refund of 11 per cent at major airports, ports and land checkpoints throughout China for purchases of RMB500 (US\$80) or more at designated stores.

2 Accor-Huazhu alliance

Accor and China Lodging Group (or Huazhu) reached a strategic long-term alliance last December, under which Accor's economy and midscale brands will enter Huazhu's loyalty and distribution networks. Huazhu will also receive exclusive rights as a master franchisee in China, Taiwan and Mongolia.

Huazhu plans to open 350 to 400 new economy and midscale

hotels in the next five years. It will also be a minority shareholder in a joint venture for operations and development of Accor's luxury and upscale brands in the Greater China region.

The partners also plan to link up their global reservation and loyalty platforms, culminating in over 5,600 hotels worldwide and over 47 million loyalty members as of December 1, 2014.

3 New theme parks

This year will welcome the trial operation of Hello Kitty Park in Anji, Zhejiang province while 1H2016 will see the launch of Shanghai Disneyland, featuring classic Disney family entertainment with Chinese elements.

Other theme parks that are on track for opening include the Atlantis in Sanya in 2016; Shanghai Haichang Polar Ocean World in 2017; Universal Studio Beijing in 2019; as well as 12 Wanda theme parks across China.

4 Second airports for Beijing and Chengdu

The construction of Beijing's second airport is underway. Four runways and a 700,000m² termi-



Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport

nal have been planned, targeting total passenger capacity of 72 million by 2025. High-speed trains and long-distance commuting buses have also been considered to facilitate regional transportation.

Meanwhile, Chengdu received approval for its second airport in January, becoming the third Chinese city after Shanghai and Beijing with two airports. The airport will have three runways for 40 million passengers by 2025. The current Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport welcomed 37.7 million passengers in 2014.

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Forging ahead in Germany

With the government focusing on nearby countries, the trade is going it alone in German-speaking markets. By **Mimi Hudoyo**



Taman Ayun, a royal temple of the Mengwi Empire, is a landmark in Bali's Badung Regency

Destination in numbers

8.5 million

The number of visitor arrivals for January-November 2014, marking a 7.3 per cent increase

68.9%

The average occupancy of Bali hotels between January-November 2014, up by 4.1 percentage points compared with the same period in 2013, according to STR Global

Rp1.1 million

Bali's RevPAR from January-November 2014, equivalent to US\$86.50, nine per cent higher than during the same period in 2013, according to STR Global

39,000

The estimated number of rooms in Bali by end-2014, compared with 34,000 in 2013, according to STR Global

Badung Promotion Board, the newly set up promotional body of Bali's Badung Regency (not to be confused with Bandung, the capital of West Java) is making its international presence in Germany felt with a table-top session in Frankfurt and by participating in ITB Berlin.

Held on March 2 in Frankfurt, the table-top session saw 12 suppliers from Bali meeting German wholesalers and retail agents in the board's first major event since its inauguration last August.

Herdy Sayoga, board member, Badung Promotion Board, said: "The table-top session is meant to update business partners, especially the retail agents, on products – not only from the Badung area, but also Bali and even Indonesia.

"Our job in Badung is to give travellers who have stayed with us before reasons to stay longer, and those who choose to stay elsewhere in Bali, reasons to visit us. To do that, we need to entice

wholesalers and retailers to sell Bali and Indonesia," he said.

The Badung Promotion Board was spurred to action as the declining euro against the US dollar makes the longhaul European market more challenging to court, as does Indonesia's own marketing refocus to short- and medium-haul destinations.

Tourism minister Arief Yahya announced in early February that the government would allocate 50 per cent of its promotional budget to chase intra-ASEAN travel, 30 per cent to other Asian markets and Australia, and 20 per cent for the longhaul market. This reflects Indonesia's aims for 20 million arrivals by 2019 – 50 per cent is expected to come from ASEAN, 30 per cent from the rest of Asia and Australia, and the remaining 20 per cent from longhaul markets.

Ismail Ali, executive director, Marintur Indonesia, noted that while Indo-

nesia's aggressive marketing campaign at ITB Berlin over the last two years has ensured the continuous growth of European arrivals despite the economic situation, any slowdown in promotions would have a negative impact for tourism, especially with the weakening euro.

He said: "As a player in the longhaul market, especially Germany, we will continue to maintain our presence in the market, (so that hopefully) we can at least reach last year's level of business."

With Germany's main trade players well-versed with Indonesian products, the country should look at B2C marketing to raise awareness among the travelling public, added Ismail.

Umberto Cadamuro, COO inbound of Pacto, said: "The huge drop in the euro is certainly not helping the booking flow, especially during 1Q2015. However, Germany, Switzerland and Austria remain some of the strongest economies

in Europe, so the market can still perform."

However, Indonesia, which does business in US dollars, is facing competition from neighbouring countries that quote prices in local currencies.

Therefore, Pacto will dangle promotions and special rates to lure German-speaking markets. "While this (tactic) is nothing new, we believe that prompt adjustment to new market conditions is the key to success," said Umberto. "We also hosted a fam trip for journalists from Austria last year, so hopefully we will see a renewed interest from this country as well in 2015."

On the other hand, Bhara Tours has secured new business out of Germany, proving it is not all gloom and doom with the market. Managing director Herman Rukmanadi said: "We have signed a contract with a German tour operator who is entering Asia for the first time, for a series of experiential tours."

The tours, running from September 2015 to June 2016, will combine Singapore and Bali, and is expected to appeal to 50-60 year old travellers that the German tour operator caters for. "We are expecting this to continue in the following season where we might introduce other routes such as Singapore-Jogjakarta-Bali," said Herman.

VIEWPOINTS What are your business prospects for 2015?



Adjie Wahjono, director of operations, AnekaKartika Tours

Our European markets will improve fairly, especially from Germany, France and Benelux. I believe they have reached their lowest point last year although 2015 will not be a full upswing year. We also expect a so-so situation from the Scandinavian and UK markets after two long seasons in 2013 and 2014. Nevertheless, I am confident they will continue improving in 2015.

Nicole Zerbola, sales manager, Happy Trails Indonesia

I expect the German market to do the best in 2015; we have been having steady growth from them the last couple of years and we predict this will continue. I feel that the Germans are slowly discovering Indonesia as a great holiday destination. Somehow the image of (Indonesia) has improved, which, for us, shows in the booking numbers.

HOW TO SELL

DO **Water rafting on Ayung River** in Bali makes a safe, fun and a breathtaking experience for all visitors. Grab your oars and partake in an exhilarating rafting adventure as you navigate through 33 class II and III rapids along a 9.6km stretch of the Ayung River against a backdrop of wild unspoiled rainforest, towering gorges and magnificent rice paddy terraces. The two-hour journey by Bali Adventure Tours is followed by a hot shower and buffet lunch at a private restaurant.

SEE **Taman Nusa** in Bali's Gianyar hills is a 15ha cultural park displaying various traditional houses from around Indonesia as well as museums in a tropical setting. The park offers comprehensive information on the culture and customs of various ethnic groups in attractive and interactive ways. The cultural village displays more than 60 traditional houses, some of which are hundreds of years old, taking visitors on a historical journey from the prehistoric to early-Indonesia era.

EAT **Café Degan**, located on Bali's Jalan Petitenget, serves up popular Indonesian specialties and an assortment of Thai favourites in a traditional Javanese *joglo* house. Recommended menu items include *soto ayam*, a popular Indonesian chicken soup; *ikan panggang kemangi*, slow simmered fish with ginger, chilli, tamarind and lemongrass; as well as *daging sambal hijau*, spicy beef in green chilli, tomato, lime leaf and lemongrass.

STAY Park Hotel Group's first resort in Indonesia, **Park Hotel Nusa Dua Bali**, is scheduled to commence operations in the first quarter of 2015. Nestled on 3.4ha of land, the upcoming resort has 152 guestrooms and suites with room sizes ranging from 25m² to 209m². It also has 39 villas, comprising 35 one-bedroom and four two-bedroom units, each with a private swimming pool and a traditional Balinese pavilion set in a lush tropical garden.

WHAT'S NEW

1 Lufthansa introduces premium economy class

Lufthansa is introducing premium economy and an improved business class to Indonesia starting early June.

Premium economy passengers will receive double the usual baggage allowance (two bags each up to 23kg), and a 50 per cent larger seat pitch. For 25 euros (US\$31), they also get access to the Business Class Lounge before take-off.

The upgraded business class now has seats that are able to transform into an almost 2m lie-flat bed and a 15-inch screen for in-flight entertainment.

2 Jakarta adds MRT and toll roads

The Jakarta Mass Rapid Transit that is under development is expected to stretch more than 108km, including 21.7km for the North-South Line (from Lebak Bulus to Kampung Bandan) and 87km for the East-West Line (from Balaraja to Cikarang).

The first phase stretching 15.7km from Lebak Bulus to the Hotel Indonesia Round-



Hotel Mulia Senayan, Jakarta

bout is targeted to be ready by early-2018.

Six toll roads of a total of 69,770km with a budget of Rp42 trillion (US\$3.5 billion) are also in the planning. Development of the toll road will be divided into three phases with the first one to start in early-2015 and finish in 2018, while the second and third will begin in 2018 and 2020 respectively.

3 Hotel Mulia Senayan launches The Suites

Hotel Mulia Senayan, Jakarta has introduced The Suites collection following a refurbishment of the 996-room hotel.

The Suites comprise the Junior Suite, Royal Suite, The Baron Suite, The Earl Suite, The Marquess Suite and The Duke Suite in ascending order of luxury, spanning 57m² to 595m².

All suites provide guests with 1,000 thread-count bedding, priority check-in and check-out lane, priority access to all F&B outlet, butler service, luxury

bathrobe and toilet amenities, refreshments throughout the day, and evening cocktails with hors d'oeuvres at the Mulia Executive Lounge.

Guests staying at The Suites also receive benefits such as airport transfers, immigration assistance and VVIP private pickup at the aircraft doorsteps. Different services are available for different room categories.

4 Trans Resort Bali debuts in Seminyak

The Trans Resort Bali is a new luxury property that opened its doors in December 2014 in the Seminyak area.

The 184-key resort features guestrooms, suites and 16 palatial villas with private pools.

Two F&B facilities are available. Meeting facilities include The Grand Ballroom with maximum capacity of 1,100 pax and seven boardrooms.

Other facilities include a spa, fitness centre, kids' club and the Mozaic Beach Club.

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Voyager of the Seas at Port Klang

ASEAN cruising finds sea legs

International cruise operators may be embracing South-east Asia as a market as well as a destination but are travellers from around the region returning their affections? [Mimi Hudoyo](#), [S Puvaneswary](#), [Paige Lee Pei Qi](#), [Greg Lowe](#) and [Rosa Ocampo](#) find out more

Sea-based explorations of South-east Asia are experiencing a surge in demand from within and outside the region, and cruise lines have been quick to expand their reach here with new homeportings and itineraries in recent years.

Intra-ASEAN cruising remains the dominant choice, report cruise lines and travel consultants.

A growing middle class lure more ships

ASEAN travellers are taking up regional itineraries over international itineraries 70:30, according to Royal Caribbean Cruises' managing director, Singapore and South-east Asia, Jennifer Yap, who attributed this to closer proximity and better flight availability.

"The number of guests from ASEAN taking up regional cruises has also grown 50 per cent year-on-year, especially with... the arrival of the new *Quantum of the Seas* (in Singapore this) June," said Yap.

Royal Caribbean International's *Mariner of the Seas* is plying 29 sailings for the current Singapore season until March 2015. Itineraries range from three to five nights, cruising to Malaysia and/or Thailand.

Carnival Asia has also doubled its regional market share in the past two years as well. Farriek Tawfik, director of South-east Asia of Carnival's Princess Cruises, credited this to the region's booming consumer market and rising purchasing power of the middle class. "We expect double-digit growth in passenger traffic and 30 per cent growth in sales for regional cruise

packages in (2015)."

First-time cruisers and large family groups from the region tend to take three-to five-day cruises, opt for larger ships and also prefer more affordable itineraries within South-east Asia since it is nearer to home.

Farriek commented that Princess Cruises is seeing an "increase in first-time cruisers and young Asians". Based on Carnival Asia's research, a larger proportion of 18- to 30-year-olds in Singapore aspire to go on a cruise holiday than the over-65 age group.

Given such a forecast, it is unsurprising that Princess Cruises entered a strategic partnership with Changi Airport Group and Singapore Tourism Board to promote fly-cruises out of Singapore last year.

Markets ripe for plucking for the Sin-

gapore-centred fly-cruise segment are the Philippines and Indonesia.

Jenica Ferrer, sales and operations officer at Travel People Philippines, Costa Cruises' preferred sales agent and groundhandler in the Philippines, said about half of Costa's Filipino clients sail around ASEAN.

Ferrer attributes "strong bookings" to the lower cost of cruising compared with other means of travel, especially competitive fly-cruises in the region due to the proliferation of LCCs.

Filipinos like flying into Singapore and sailing to Thailand and Malaysia, though some also venture farther to Shanghai, Japan and South Korea.

Elsewhere in the region, travel consultants are also reporting a continued preference for ASEAN cruises. Anthony Chan, group managing director and CEO, Chan Brothers Travel Singapore, said: "We have seen a 30 per cent year-on-year increase in demand for regional cruises from Singapore."

Passengers range from busy professionals to multi-generation families and groups of friends with a budget, he said.

"Since international cruise liners began deploying ships in South-east Asia, they



Demand for cruising in South-east Asia is growing because travellers want to try the facilities on board, the duration is short and the price is affordable.

Rudiana
Director of sales, WITA Tour Indonesia



have been promoting heavily in Indonesia, collaborating with travel companies and offering promotional fares," said WITA Tour Indonesia's director of sales, Rudiana, who said demand for ASEAN cruising has been increasing.

Meanwhile Buhdy Bok, senior vice president Pacific Asia and China, Costa Cruises, noted China's growing appetite for intra-ASEAN cruises, such that the *Costa Serena* will be deployed year-round in Shanghai starting April 2015.

On the other hand, local markets have also been a mainstay for Star Cruises. "Star Cruises' three key ASEAN markets are Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia," said Michael Goh, vice president sales. "Both our two- and three-night destination-centric cruises (in Asia) are very popular with ASEAN travellers."

"We've seen year-on-year growth in the family segment for *SuperStar Libra* mainly due to its affordable pricing. The fact that it is homeported in Penang, which has good access out of our main customer base Kuala Lumpur, also helps," Goh said.

Enter the Muslim, incentive markets

The lucrative Muslim market is also taking to cruising, in the meantime.

Rakyat Travel Kuala Lumpur's CEO, Adam Kamal, told *TTG Asia*: "We've seen a 20 per cent increase in year-on-year bookings for family travel on *SuperStar Libra*, mainly due to the availability of halal food on board. This is very important to entice the Muslim market, which is our main customer base."

Sunflower Holidays Kuala Lumpur's managing director, Mint Leong, said the company is promoting the idea of cruising as an incentive, which is still a novel idea in Malaysia. "In 2014 we started to market *SuperStar Libra*'s 4D3N cruise from Penang to local corporates looking for new incentive ideas."

Negotiations with two multi-level marketing companies for incentive cruises are also underway at the moment, she revealed.

"We have seen demand growing in the last two years from both FITs and corporate incentives for South-east Asian cruises. They take 4D3N or 5D4N packages, boarding in Singapore and cruising to Malaysia and Thailand," said Edhi Sutadharma, general manager of Golden Rama Tours and Travel Indonesia.

Far-flung destinations keep appeal

On the other hand, cruise travellers with deeper pockets in South-east Asia tend to

gravitate towards far-flung destinations.

Paul Garcia, director of public relations at Crystal Cruises, said that while demand for cruises from Asia-based clients remains strong, especially from Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, most travellers are opting to go beyond South-east Asia. Mediterranean and Baltic itineraries remain firm favourites.

He explained: "The ultra-luxury cruise guest is much more adventurous

than the regular cruiser and therefore is seeking destinations much farther afield, though they sometimes book a regional sailing at the very last minute if they opt for a last-minute holiday."

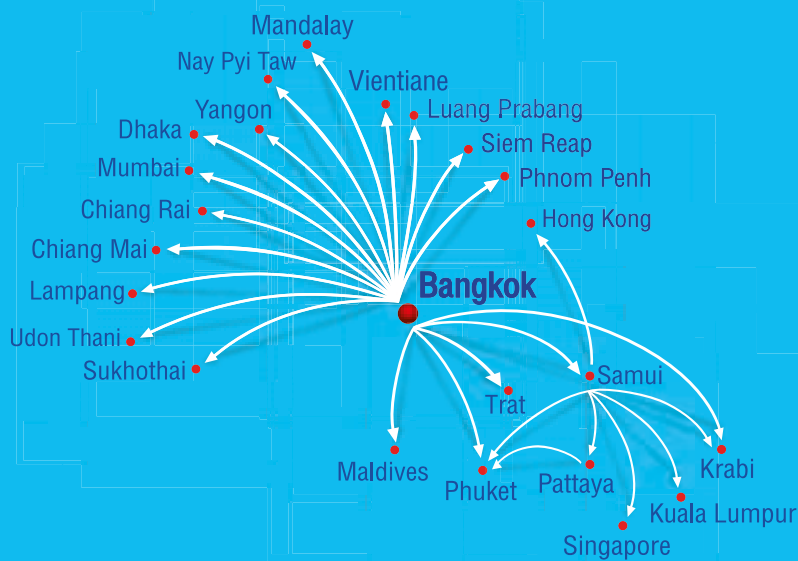
Likewise, cruise specialists in Thailand say demand for intra-regional trips remains weak. Supanee Bencharit, managing director of SEA Tours Thailand, said Crystal Cruises and Oceania Cruises remain the leading choices for

local clients, who range from 40 to 80 years old and comprise both FIT and group travel.

Star Cruises' Goh added: "Our affluent guests are eager to experience long-haul cruises to worldwide destinations especially with our ships, *Norwegian Breakaway* and *Norwegian Getaway*." Popular destinations include Alaska, the Mediterranean and Caribbean, or Hawaii, he shared.



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Macau Government Tourist Office Germany's Stefanie Sonnenschein, Margit Schwarz, Regina Bopp and Christine Petit-Wolf



Third from left: Cambodia Ministry of Tourism's Visothy So, So Mara and Song Tong Hap



Seoul Tourism Organization's Jihyun Kim



The South Beach Singapore's Henry Ng

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- Hike up dormant Mt. Iraya in Basco.

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