



ITB
Asia

ITB Asia
October 22, 2015
Singapore

Issue

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Borobudur Temple

The magnificent Borobudur temple is the world's biggest Buddhist monument, an ancient site widely considered to be one of the world's seven wonders. Built in the 9th century during the reign of the Syailendra dynasty, the temple's design in Gupta architecture reflects India's influence on the region, yet there are enough indigenous scenes and elements incorporated to make Borobudur uniquely Indonesian. This awe inspiring monument is truly a marvel. After a visit here you will understand why it is Indonesia's most visited tourist attraction and a famous icon of Indonesia's cultural heritage.





Located on the island of Java, the temple sits majestically on a hilltop overlooking lush green fields and distant hills. It covers an enormous area, measuring 123 x 123 meters. The monument is a marvel of design, decorated with 2,672 relief panels and 504 Buddha statues. The architecture and stonework of this temple has no equal. And it was built without using any kind of cement or mortar! The structure is like a set of massive interlocking Lego blocks held together without any glue



Mola - mola Fish
Nusa Penida - Bali

Photo by : Cipto Aji Gunawan



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'Honesty is the best policy'

When a crisis strikes, honesty and consistency matter most when engaging the media

By Mimi Hudoyo and Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

WHEN a crisis hits a destination, the best way industry stakeholders can circumvent the situation and prevent another crisis from unfolding is to engage the media constructively.

Speaking at the TTG Media Engaging workshop yesterday, Imtiaz Muqbil, executive editor of *Travel Impact Newswire*, said: "Do not try to sweep things under the carpet. You have to confront the problem because it is not going to go away."

Thailand stands out in the region as destination that has mastered "the whole art of crisis management down to a tee", opined Muqbil. "Every time a crisis hit, (the Thai authorities) know exactly what they should do. That is why in terms of visitor number, they have seen minimum impact," he said.

On the contrary, Ken Scott, managing director of Scott Asia Communications, believes that the Thai government could have better handled the recent Erawan Shrine bombing, which also provided learning points in crisis communicators.

"It is all right to say 'I don't know' if you don't know. Do not speculate," Scott remarked, adding that the authorities should appoint one spokesperson to liaise with the media to avoid conflicting information.



Asia's top media practitioners and industry players speak out on crisis communications. Back row, from left: Scott Asia Communications' Ken Scott, Travel Impact Newswire's Imtiaz Muqbil, Sabah Parks' Jamili Nais, Sojern's Stewart Hunter, Tiger Mountain Nepal's Marcus Cotton, E-Quill News Media and Six-Six News' Kannan Chandran, HRS' Todd Arthur and TTG Asia Media's Darren Ng. Front row: TTG Asia Media's Xinyi Liang-Pholsena and Raini Hamdi

Acknowledging the heightened media attention – as well as sensationalism – during crises, Marcus Cotton, managing director of Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge in Nepal, said: "If it bleeds, it leads...When there is intense spotlight on the stage, the rest of the stage goes into blackness."

Furthermore, the online era has enabled the general populace to become reporters too. "Everyone with a phone nowadays basically is a member of the media, there is no such thing as *the* media anymore," added Muqbil.

"The cumulative power of individuals will allow you to push back against imbalanced report-

ing in the mainstream media. You're no longer at the mercy of the mainstream media."

While social media allows the word to get out faster, problems could arise when inaccurate information gets disseminated, pointed out Kannan Chandran, founder and publisher of E-Quill News Media and Six-Six News.

"The role of the media is to ensure that the information is authenticated and that viral content don't get viral until due diligence has been exercised to verify the information," said Chandran.

Questioning if it was the media or the public that needed handling in times of crises, he

added: "Both need to work together. The media needs to be measured in how they present the facts, while public needs to take a step back and check the story if the facts are true."

Adopting a proactive stance in disseminating information quickly and accurately is hence paramount for authorities to prevent crisis communication from spiralling out of control, the speakers emphasised.

When queried on how tourism organisations can tackle misinformation coming from the public, Scott suggested: "Bite your bottom lip and correct them nicely and consistently."

See you at South Beach tonight

TTG Asia Media invites ITB Asia delegates for a night of glitz at the first Philippe Starck-designed hotel in Singapore, The South Beach, tonight, from 21.30 to 24.00.

This will be the first time the hotel will be throwing open its doors to its highly anticipated grand ballroom, which is housed in a heritage building nestled beneath a hanging forest of lights.

The 654-room designer luxury hotel is exuberantly decked out by Starck inside, and features architecture by the renowned Foster + Partners and Aedas.

Key property highlights include two sky gardens and infinity swimming pools on level 18, which are also bedecked with an eclectic mix of designer couches and armchairs for one to sit on and admire the breathtaking cityscape.

The hotel, which emphasises imaginative social spaces, has plenty of chic locations for social networking and photo opportunities.

Simply present the invitation card or your delegate badge upon arrival at The South Beach Grand Ballroom, and get ready to join us for an electrifying night there.

Visit the TTG Cybercafe (R32) or The South Beach booth (F05) for more details about this party.



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News

Reinventing in-transit

Plaza Premium opens first Aerotel in Singapore, more to follow

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

INDEPENDENT airport lounge operator Plaza Premium Group, which has been widening its portfolio into airport-related services, now boasts a new feather to its cap – airport accommodation.

Marking the global debut of the group's new airport transit hotel brand, Aerotel Singapore has just soft-opened in Changi International Airport this week. A second hotel will open in Abu Dhabi International Airport by this year-end and a third in London Heathrow Airport in 2016.

Speaking exclusively to the *Daily*, Song Hoi See, founder and CEO of Plaza Premium Group, said: "People don't have high expectations of airport hotels but we have... We want to fill up the inefficient gaps in airports to provide seamless services for travellers."

The first Aerotel will offer "five-star hardware at three-star prices", featuring a resort feel with such amenities as an outdoor swimming pool, jacuzzi, gym and library lounge, plus a customised pillow menu.

Rates at Aerotel are charged based on a six-hour block, begin-



We take care of passengers not taken care of by airlines, i.e. the remaining 85 per cent flying on coach.

Song Hoi See
Founder & CEO,
Plaza Premium Group

ning from S\$90-S\$130 (US\$65-US\$94) depending on the room sizes, with every subsequent hour priced at S\$20 each.

The Hong Kong-based company will also roll out its Premium Lounges in airports in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Taiwan Taoyuan, Salalah and Brisbane

within this year, and Rio de Janeiro by April 2016 in time for the 2016 Olympics, revealed Song.

He added: "Our plan by 2018 is to launch 200 outlets and we have allocated over US\$100 million for our (overall) expansion, with US\$56 million budgeted for Premium Lounges, up from US\$40 million."

Seeking to change the perception that airport lounges are reserved for just first and business class passengers, Song remarked: "We take care of passengers not taken care of by airlines, i.e. the remaining 85 per cent flying on coach."

As well, the group is launching its airport meet-and-greet service, Allways, in phrases in seven airports worldwide, beginning with Toronto Pearson International Airport and New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, followed by airports in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Macau, Muscat and Heathrow.

Providing conveniences such as customs clearance, pick-ups and baggage handling, Allways will be suitable for corporate VIPs, families and first-time travellers, Song added.



UNIQUE PRODUCT

Gain back your profit share by going beyond Best Available Rates, Duetto claims

GO BEYOND THE BAR

WITH OTAs increasingly encroaching into the profits of hoteliers, revenue strategy solutions provider Duetto aims to help hoteliers get back their "fair share of profitability".

Speaking to the *Daily*, Patrick Bosworth, co-founder and CEO of Duetto, said: "What we are seeing now is that hotel industry revenues are rising, but commissions paid to third parties are growing twice as fast so we need

to do something to help hoteliers figure out what to do."

Bosworth said Duetto's "open pricing" model will help them independently price each room, segment and channel based on actual demand, beyond the traditional best available rate approach.

While five years ago, a mere three per cent of hoteliers in Asia-Pacific were using a revenue management system, Bosworth said this had since grown to about 10 per cent.

Duetto has signed up two hotels in Hong Kong, The Upper House and Hotel Icon, in the past few months. According to Bosworth, it has netted an additional 30 hotels in Asia-Pacific but declined to disclose them.

He said: "Hotel companies are very good at managing the real estate and the guest experience, but what is hard for them is to keep up with rapid innovation in business models and technology as it is very hard to do all three." – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Here's a good one: 'triple twinning'

NONGSA Resorts is collaborating with selected Singapore-based travel agencies to roll out cross-border "triple twinning" tour packages which will promote the seaport routes between Singapore, Batam and Bintan at

ITB Asia and beyond. For the first time this year, it is in both Wonderful Indonesia pavilion and YourSingapore pavilion in support of both countries' move towards promoting Singapore and Indonesia jointly.

Malaysia promotes Perak to S'pore market as new flights take off

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

MALAYSIA is promoting the state of Perak to the Singapore market as new direct flights daily between the state's capital, Ipoh, and the Lion City take off.

The effort is also aimed at growing tourism beyond the traditional cities, not to mention that Singapore arrivals to Malaysia saw an 8.6 per cent drop during the first three months as compared to the

same period last year.

Malindo Air commenced daily flights between Singapore and Ipoh in July. Earlier in May, Tigerair inaugurated its Singapore-Ipoh route with four weekly services. These flights are in addition to Firefly's current offering of 14 weekly flights between the two cities.

These new direct air connections not only reflect rising interest in Perak, but will help

boost demand to the destination, according to Malaysia's tourism and culture minister, Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz.

Malaysia received 13.9 million arrivals from Singapore last year, an increase of 5.7 per cent, but due to this year's drop, needed "a new approach to lure hesitant Singaporeans to visit or revisit Malaysia", he said.

"Malaysia actually has a lot to offer beyond the usual popular cities like Kuala Lumpur and Malacca. We see that Perak has a lot of potential because there is a

lot of history, heritage and nature products that Perak offers, and Singaporeans will love the fact that Perak has some of the best street food in Malaysia."

According to Tourism Perak's tourism, arts, culture, multimedia and communications committee chairman Nolee Ashilin Mohammed Radzi, at least 80 per cent of tourists who visit Perak are domestic Malaysian travellers, while Singapore comprises 50 per cent of the foreign tourism market.

She said: "This is a good time

to raise awareness of our state because we see that Singaporeans are becoming more interested in exploring other cities besides the typical ones."

Nolee added that new products like Malaysia's first animation theme park, Movie Animation Park Studios, slated to open in Ipoh next year, will also increase Perak's appeal.

To drum up publicity, Nolee said Tourism Perak would continue to participate in trade shows and work closely with travel consultants.



Mohamed Nazri:
Flight boost



VisitTheUSA.com

News

Finland woos Asians

Agency ties to be strengthened ahead of launch of new stopover programme

By S Puvaneswary

VISIT Finland aims to build “solid” tour operator and travel agency partnerships in Asia to develop Finland as a stopover destination for Asian passengers travelling via Helsinki Airport to other destinations in Europe.

It will be introducing a new Stopover Finland programme by May 2016, consisting of 50 attractive packages in Helsinki and beyond that range from five hours to five days. The NTO also plans to increase its visibility at ITB Asia in 2016 in order to build trade partnerships.

Visit Finland’s Stopover Finland programme director, Heli Mende, said: “The success of Stopover Finland requires solid tour operator and travel agent partnerships. By investing in the visibility at ITB Asia 2016, Stopover Finland wants to invite new partners to consider selling Finland as a stopover destination to their clients travelling from Asia to Europe.”

Travellers can experience Finnish highlights from Northern lights to midnight sun, relaxing in Finnish forests, lakes and sauna, shopping for Finnish design items, and meeting popular characters like Moomins and Santa Claus.

Finland’s two largest Asian markets,

China and Japan, which accounted for six to seven per cent of total arrivals in 2014, are expected to grow further when Finnair adds two new routes to North Asia in summer 2016.

Starting from May 7, 2016, Finnair will launch a thrice-weekly route to Fukuoka, Japan. In addition, there will be a four-times weekly service from Helsinki to Guangzhou, China, but that seasonal route will operate only from May 6 to October 29, 2016. The two new routes will both use the Airbus A330-300.

Fukuoka will be the fourth Japanese city that Finnair flies to, after Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka. Guangzhou is Finnair’s sixth destination in Greater China after Beijing, Chongqing, Hong Kong and Shanghai and Xi’an.

Finnair will also take delivery of its first four A350 XWB orders this

year, while another seven will be delivered over the next two years. For its Asian network, the A350 XWB will be deployed to Shanghai from November 21, progressively to Beijing and Bangkok by the end of 2015, and to Hong Kong and Singapore by the first half of 2016. The Airbus A350 XWB will replace the A340s currently plying these longhaul routes.

Finnair’s country sales manager, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, Nick Naung Naung, said: “The A350 XWB aircraft is 25 per cent more fuel efficient and quieter than the A340s, and the extra wide body of the A350s offers more space and wider seats for greater passenger comfort. The Finnair A350 XWB has 297 seats – 46 in business class, 43 in economy comfort and 208 in economy class.”



The success of Stopover Finland requires solid tour operator support.

Heli Mende
Stopover Finland programme director
Visit Finland

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YOUNG OWNER PICKS RAMADA FOR HIS FIRST DEVELOPMENT IN PHUKET

By Raini Hamdi

C.A.S. Asset Phuket is developing a 33 rai (5.3ha) vacant land just 10 minutes’ drive to downtown Phuket into “the new destination of Phuket” and “the biggest and most major project in the city in years”.

The development will comprise a 262-room modern Peranakan (Straits Chinese) design hotel and attractions such as a Phuket Eye ferris wheel, a Peranakan museum, and a Seafood Market and Food Street that will bring the best of southern Thai cuisine, handicraft and entertainment under one roof.

The hotel will be called Ramada Chaofa Phuket. This will be the company’s first venture into hotel and tourism, said managing director Tanakrit Dararattaraj, whose family owns the land.

“We have been in the paper business, as well as real estate, but not hotels or tourism. We need to diversify. For our first project, we want to make sure we can offer something unique in Phuket, which needs new attractions.

“I picked the Peranakan theme for the hotel because of my Hokkien roots. There is a huge Peranakan community in Phuket actually. But while visitors are famil-



iar with Sino-Portuguese buildings in Phuket, the Peranakan heritage is somewhat forgotten. We want to bring back that heritage and do it properly. We want the experience to be memorable for both Thais and foreigners,” he said.

Research on all things Peranakan is being done to ensure authenticity. Tanakrit believes the Ramada brand is perfect for the hotel because “it is a strong name and the product matches a good four-star (brand)”.

When open in 2017, in line with the completion of Phuket International Airport’s expansion, it should draw the neighbouring Asian markets such as Singapore and Malaysia, the regional markets such as China, and markets further afield who want something different in Phuket.



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Snapshots

Travel leaders take a break

Eugene Tang captures CEOs having cocktails at The Patina, Capitol, after their summit on Tuesday



IDP DFS Budi Setiawan, Singapore Tourism Board (STB)'s Andrew Puah and Lionel Yeo, TTG Asia's Raini Hamdi, STB's chairman Chew Choon Seng, Panorama Group's Budi Tirtawisata and STB's Lynette Pang



Royal Caribbean Cruises' Gavin Smith, Thomas Cook India's Madhavan Menon and Royal Caribbean Cruises Asia's Sean Treacy



GfK (Growth From Knowledge)'s Anthony Tan, Laurens van der Oever and Lawrence Liew



Parkway Hospitals Singapore's Jessica Teo and Anthony Lim, and STB's Lynette Wee



SingEx's Aloysius Arlando and Singapore Furniture Industries Council's Shermaine Ong and Ernie Koh



MillwardBrown Vermeer Singapore's Nico Stouthart



Tour East's Shigeyuki Suzuki and Judy Lum, and STB's John Gregory Conceicao



The Patina, Capitol, Singapore's Jean-Pierre Joncas, Tracy Lowe and Sereena Supa'at, STB's Andrew Phua and Patina Hotels & Resorts' Marc Dardenne



ACI HR Solutions' Andrew Chan and Thomas Lim



Marina Bay Sands Singapore's Benny Zin and Anthea Tan



World Travel & Tourism Council's and TUI's Michael Frenzel with wife Gabriel



Saviok Service Robots USA's Steve Cousins and Izumi Yaskawa, Marina Bay Sands Singapore's Ian Wilson and The Patina, Capitol, Singapore's Tracy Lowe

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MARINA BAY SANDS - SINGAPORE

Jakarta

News

Indonesia chums up to S'pore

It aims to grow Singapore market by leaps and bounds as well as step up joint promotions with the neighbour

By Mimi Hudoyo

INDONESIA aims to grow the Singapore market exponentially, now that Batam and Bintan airports and seaports are visa-free (since June).

Although Singaporeans do not need visas, Arief Yahya, Indonesia's minister of tourism, pointed out there are 1.6 million expats in the Lion City, aside from 3.8 million Singapore residents. "Last year, we received 1.5 million visitors from Singapore, so the potential to grow the Singapore market is still huge," he said.

The ministry wants to increase the number by 10 per cent this year, and 20 per cent next year. But despite being a close neighbour and currently the number one source market, the destination needs a marketing strategy beyond the *Wonderful Indonesia*

image, he said.

Yahya said: "Some 70 per cent of the arrivals from Singapore are to Batam and Bintan. We will continue to promote these gateways, and to facilitate the opening of more airports and seaports in this area as they are visa-free."

In the first two months following the visa-free regulation, arrivals to Bintan were higher than to Batam for the first time ever, with the number of nationalities growing as well.

Currently, there are 523 direct air connections between Singapore and 14 Indonesian cities every week. The ministry also aims to use this opportunity to market more Indonesian destinations beyond Batam, Bintan, Bali and Jakarta.

For this, it has allotted 15 per cent of this year's tourism budget



Emirsyah Satar (advisor to Indonesia's minister of tourism), minister of tourism Arief Yahya, Accor Hotels' Garth Simmons and Garuda Indonesia's Sentot Mujiono

(of US\$100 million) and this sum will be increased to US\$300 million next year, or 20 per cent of next year's budget.

Rizki Handayani, assistant to the deputy minister of international marketing, South-east Asia, said: "Singaporeans know

Indonesia well. What we need to do is to focus on certain market segments such as the younger generation and promote special interest tours like diving in Raja Ampat or Wakatobi."

Marketing efforts have started with destination advertisements on public transport, trade fair participation, sales missions, and fam trips and media promotions.

The Indonesian ministry also has an agreement with its Singapore counterpart to jointly attract travellers from other countries to visit both Singapore and Indonesia, using the former as hub.

On its part, Singapore's Changi Airport recently had a dedicated space to promote Singapore and Bintan as twin destinations to the China market.

AccorHotels.com lures more independent hotels

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

ACCOR is targeting to lure more independent hotels in Asia-Pacific to join AccorHotels.com, following its unorthodox move to open the website to them in September.

Since then, Accor has started using FastBooking's technology and branding as a way to distribute rates and inventory from independent hotels in the region.

Speaking to *TTG Asia Daily*, co-CEO of FastBooking, Jean-Luc Chretien, said: "The idea

comes from the concept of a marketplace (where) you want to put the shopping mall into your (mega) store.

"AccorHotels.com is already a big online store but to generate greater traffic and visibility, there must be a greater (variety of properties) to offer visitors," he said.

Apart from attracting independent hotels in France, Italy



Chretien: OTA domination prevention

and Spain, AccorHotels.com has also been successful in getting independent hotels in Bangkok and Singapore to the website, Chretien said, with a pipeline of around 500 hotels from these five markets expected to be added by the end of the year. The

initiative will then be extended to three-, four- and five-star hotels in Malaysia and Indonesia next year.

Hotels that list themselves on AccorHotels.com will benefit from the lower commission rate of 14 per cent, in comparison to rates offered by OTAs that can go to as high as 25 per cent, according to Chretien.

Chretien elaborated: "OTAs will still exist but we want to rebalance the business and prevent their dominance."

In time, this platform intends to feature more than 10,000 hotels worldwide, thrice the number of inventory it currently has.

When asked if this distribution model means greater competition for Accor's hotels, Chretien said: "Yes and no. When you have minimal properties to sell, you will have minimal customers coming to your store."

"There are more properties for customers to choose. Since we started commercialising the platform in September, we have not seen any decrease in the number of bookings for the Accor hotels. Instead we have seen more volume clicks," he said.

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MICE feature

The way of the Dragon

International associations keen to organise events in China must not only do their homework, they must play by its rules and find a suitable local PCO partner. **Caroline Boey** finds out more

Holding a meeting in China is the target of US association meeting buyer Kimberly LaBounty, president and founder of Apex Management and Special Events.

Apex is an AMC based in the US and its clients include legal, medical and publishing professionals, and LaBounty, who was attending IT&CM China for the first time in April, is eyeing a spring 2017 date.

"I am very likely to recommend taking our publishing association conference to China in spring 2017 as publishing is a growing and changing market in China and there is tremendous potential.

"We realise not many educational conferences have been held in Asia, so it would be an opportunity for us to be among the first. We would like to hold a conference in Shanghai or Beijing to share best practices.

"We already hold conferences in the US and Europe, and expanding to Asia will allow the association to be perceived as a truly global organisation," she said.

Several associations managed by Apex have members all over the world, and they are looking to expand into China and other Asian countries and are eager to learn from Asia on how best to provide the services needed.

However LaBounty says China's proposed law – The Non-Mainland Non-Governmental Organizations Management Law of the People's Republic of China – not allowing foreign associations to hold meetings in China could pose a problem.

American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) believes the draft legislation will make it extremely difficult for US trade associations and professional societies to be active in China, adding that major restrictions would be placed on the ability of its association professionals to meet, share knowledge, conduct business, and share best practices with Chinese associations, severely curtailing association programmes in China.

ASAE president and CEO John Gra-

ham, expressing his concern in a letter to the Law Committee of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, said the legislation would significantly impact US and China economic and commercial relations.

Jeffery Huang, deputy secretary-general and associate researcher of the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies based in Beijing says being able to contribute to local cultural, economic and social development is important for anyone organising an event in China.

"Managing cost, securing a high-level keynote speaker and attracting enough participants can be some of the challenges," he added.

Liu Ping, CEO of China Star, a leading PCO in China, observed that association meetings seem to be slowing down (based on ICCA's 2013-2015 figures). "I'm concerned that China does not have a 'unified competent authority (to champion the industry)'" she added.

"I'm not sure how long it will take China to have a national CVB but cities such as Shanghai, Hangzhou and Chengdu have gone ahead to set up departments under their tourism administrations to promote events," she noted.

Pulling off a successful event in China requires a deep mindset change and international buyers must be aware of the challenges they may face working with local partners and government entities.

In a presentation to local and international association meetings buyers and sellers, Liu Yi, deputy director, China Star, gave a no-holds barred overview of some of the obstacles that stand in the way of China's international association meetings landscape.

Liu Yi said it is important for international PCOs to co-operate with a local partner who understands and knows the ins-and-outs of China's requirements and conditions, can cut through government red tape, be able to appoint reliable suppliers, etc.

In China it can take at least 18 months, some times years, for an association meeting to materialise and the reporting system and approval if foreign delegates are attending is complicated, he noted, adding that government influence can positively impact an event.



sociations need to be mindful of and Liu Yi recommends using a local professional PCO. There is a strict limit on the issuing of business visa invitations, but it is improving, he added.

"Associations think they can be their own PCOs, but in China, a professional and reliable PCO can also help cut waste and take care of areas such as catering and distributing hundreds of box lunches on-site."

Jennifer Salsbury, the former senior director, international, at Beijing's China National Convention Center, said China's processes are unique and truly different.

In communicating with the government, "formulaic" and "government speak" is necessary. "It's a different 'language' and this is the challenge," Salsbury noted.

Now running IMC-Convention Solutions covering Beijing, Hong Kong and Australia, Salsbury said China's understanding of international competition is not on the same level compared to other countries in the region.

"China has no CVB or subvention programme to attract meetings, and raising professional standards and getting government recognition is what China must strive for," she said.

Liu Ping added: "Many cities in China have built impressive venues but have no professional staff to run or market them. There is a big gap."

On the other hand, if the government requests a site inspection, the venue operator may be required to stop an event in-between so that an empty venue can be showcased and it resumes when the site inspection is completed, he noted.

Applying for visas is another area as-



Size of China's meetings market

2013	340
2014	280
2015	107

Source: ICCA

Breakdown of China's meetings market

Corporate meetings	54.1%
Government and institution meetings	36.6%
Associations and societies	9.3%

Where meetings in China are held

Five-star hotels	38.19%
Four-star hotels	32.98%
Three-star hotels	10.76%
Convention centres	4.51%
Clubs	3.12%
Training centres	2.43%
Theatres	1.73%
Other venues	5.19%

Source: China Star

Functions of a PCO in China

- Assist in the bidding process
- Provide budgeting and finance management, fees to charge, handle currency exchange issues and estimate loss or profit
- Website development and marketing
- Venue planning: equipment required, catering, etc
- Online, offline registration
- Scheduling and planning
- Supplier management
- On-site management
- Post-event audit

Source: China Star

China has no CVB or subvention programme to attract meetings, and raising professional standards and getting government recognition is what China must strive for.

Jennifer Salsbury
CEO, IMC-Convention Solutions

MICE feature

Playground for the corporates

No just a wonderland of fun for kids, theme parks are making their spaces friendly for corporate clients too

Asia has witnessed an explosion of theme parks in recent years, many themed around popular cartoon and movie characters and brandishing the latest in fun ride technology.

While these theme parks may have been built with families with children and the young-at-heart in mind, these attractions are also gaining fans in the corporate circle.

Popular theme parks such as Hong Kong Disneyland and Universal Studios Singapore, which offer private venue hires and are equipped with themed spaces that make memorable venues for networking functions, meetings, product launches, gala and award dinners, are no stranger to corporate event organisers. They are also favoured for having quality accommodation located on site or in close proximity.

Several business event specialists told the *Daily* that theme parks are heating up as venues for corporate gatherings.

"We have observed a rising trend for meetings and incentives at theme parks," said Ankush Nijhawan, managing director of India's Nijhawan Group of Companies, noting that cities in Europe, Asia and the Middle East are "particularly successful at winning these events".

He explained that theme parks appealed to corporate clients as they combine work spaces and fun elements under one roof.

Pacific World's regional director Asia, Selina Chavry, agreed: "Theme parks with hotels in close proximity and feature a significant number of meeting and convention spaces (are getting more MICE enquiries) as they are a good alternative to conventional (venues) in city hotels. They are also equipped with facilities for post-meeting activities."

Chavry also noted that theme parks are savvy marketers. "Much focus has been channelled towards MICE buyers. Theme parks are making efforts to distinguish themselves by constant upgrade of facilities, adding new rides, etc. to leverage on the growing (business events) market. In keeping with the growing demand, the (theme park) industry has also become more organised and active on a professional level," she said.

Kota Kikui, general manager, MICE sales department of Tokyo-based Tobu Top Tours, said Japanese companies loved hosting incentives at theme parks.

"Theme parks in Japan are popular among the Japanese, so taking staff to a

theme park is a way to give (staff) unforgettable memories," said Kikui, adding that the improving national economy has led to an increase in clients rewarding staff with trips to destinations with theme parks.

Of course, not all business event organisers are sold on the idea.

Vidya Hermanto, managing director of corporate incentive management with Indonesia's Panorama Leisure, said: "Theme parks are perceived to be a place for families. We have not received any requests for meetings in a theme park, although there have been some teambuilding and family day programmes at these venues."

He added: "Because of their characteristics as a family place, there are limited activities that corporates can do there. The theme park also cannot reflect the corporate image and goal of a corporate event."

Simon Ang, managing director – operations with Celebrate Life Travel & Leisure Philippines, has observed a decline in corporate requests for theme parks.

"Clients that have done (meetings and incentives at theme parks) in the past are now interested in exploring new destinations. As they become more travel-savvy, they want to take the road least travelled

– hikes, safaris, treks and other adventure experiences – instead of visiting yet another theme park which offers the same rides and attractions," commented Ang.

The demographics of incentive winners lead to a weak demand for theme parks too, opined Richard Vuilleumier, managing director of Panorama Tours Malaysia.

He said: "Many incentive qualifiers are in their 40s and they are not so keen on theme parks as compared to shopping and visiting iconic attractions. Having said that, a half-day programme can be included in the itinerary provided the theme park is iconic, for example Tokyo Disneyland. The good weather in Tokyo is another winning factor."

Tobu Top Tours' Kikui expects corporate interest in theme parks to rise as more theme parks spring up on Asian soil.

He explained: "Japanese companies want destinations that are not too far from home because (staff) can only go away for three or four days. Japanese firms are not keen to give their staff long vacations. Theme parks in Europe or North America are too far away." – **Paige Lee, Mimi Hudo, S Puvaneswary, Rosa Ocampo, Rohit Kaul and Julian Ryall**



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MICE feature

Shanghai Disney Resort, China

Targeted opening: Spring 2016

Target markets: Mainly China but also markets across Asia and beyond

Unique selling points: Shanghai Disney Resort will be a world-class family vacation destination that combines classic Disney characters and storytelling with the uniqueness and beauty of China. The resort's vision is to build an "authentically Disney and distinctly Chinese" resort, and aims to provide unique content and experience to all visitors by introducing Chinese elements in its dining outlets, entertainment and architecture.

MICE applications: The resort will have accommodation, function rooms and in-park venues for private events. More details on its events capability will be shared at a later stage.

Twentieth Century Fox World Malaysia, Resorts World Genting

Targeted opening: End-2016

Target markets: ASEAN, Greater China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, India and the Middle East

Unique selling points: The attraction will be the world's first Twentieth Century Fox World theme park.

It will bring the "rich heritage of Twentieth Century Fox movie and television from the screen to be experienced on the ground", said Chow Wei Heng, vice president marketing with Resorts World Genting.

Perfect for family day outings and programmes for accompanying spouses and children, the theme park will feature a wide range of attractions themed after popular cartoon and movie titles like Ice Age, Epic, Rio, Alien vs Predator, Titanic and Night at the Museum.

Chow promises "something for everyone – young and old" at the future theme park.

MICE applications: Meeting venues have been allotted and there are plans to develop itineraries for event delegates. Details will be announced in early 2016.

IMG Worlds of Adventure, Dubai

Targeted opening: End-2015

Target markets: Asia

Unique selling points: IMG Worlds of Adventure is set to be the world's largest indoor temperature-controlled theme park, allowing comfortable year-round visits.

Spanning 139,355m² in size, the attraction will partner globally renowned brands such as Marvel and Cartoon Network to offer a mix of exciting themed rides and attractions that will appeal to visitors of all ages and nationalities.

There will also be an extensive F&B offering, with plans to offer Arabic, European, American and Pan-Asian cuisines.

Lennard Otta, general manager of IMG Worlds of Adventure, said the company will be developing fully licensed, bespoke merchandise, not available anywhere else in the world.

MICE applications: IMG Worlds of Adventure will play a supporting role in Dubai's quest for a growing MICE sector.

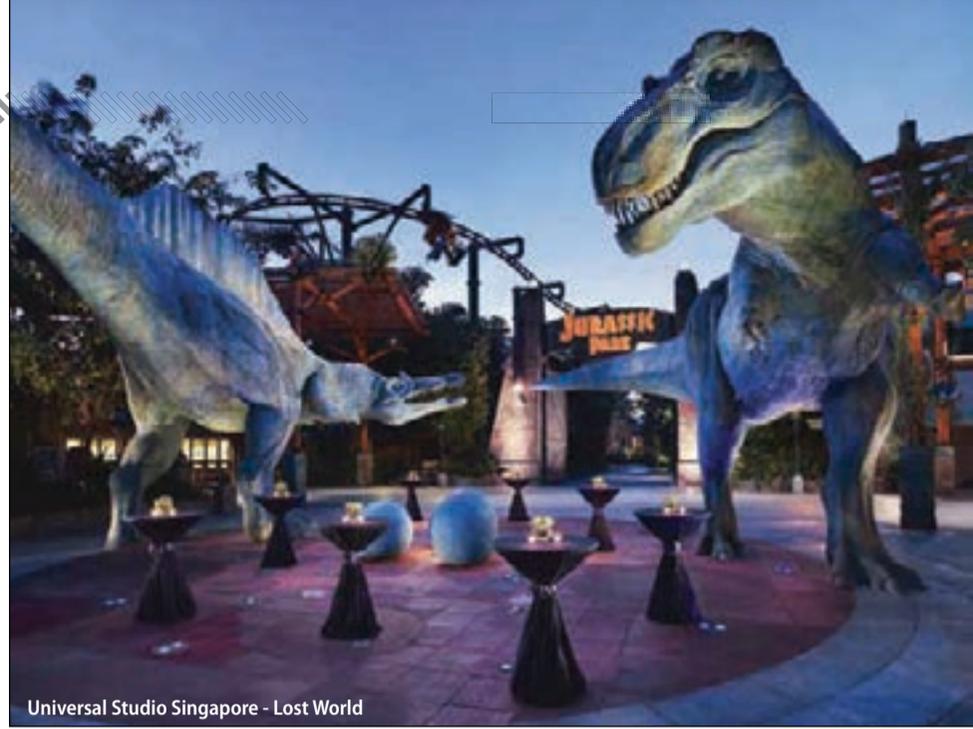
Catering to both formal and informal events alike, the attraction will house state-of-the-art facilities like amphitheatres, event halls, cinemas and themed private dining rooms. It will also provide bespoke teambuilding and entertainment packages.

Movie Animation Park Studios, Perak

Targeted opening: Mid-2016

Target markets: Domestic visitors as well as travellers from Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, China and India

Unique selling points: Said to be the first animation theme park in Asia, Movie Animation Park Studios (MAPS) is one



Universal Studio Singapore - Lost World

of the most unique and exciting projects underway in Malaysia's leisure and tourism landscape, noted Darren McLean, co-founder and CEO of Movie Animation Parks Studios.

The attraction will be launched with more than 40 attractions in six themed zones. Highlights will include:

- South-east Asia's first live car and bike stunt show, Stunt Legends, which will be performed at the 2,000-seat Stunt Legends Arena
- DreamWorks Animation Adventure Zone featuring themed attractions such as Mr Peabody & Sherman, Megamind, The Croods and Casper The Friendly Ghost
- South-east Asia's first Smurfs 'Live' animation attractions
- The world's first BoBoiBoy animation attraction
- Malaysia's tallest drop tower attraction, Megamind Megadrop
- A variety of themed performances, F&B and retail outlets

MICE applications: Stunt Legends Arena has a VIP room and can accommodate large groups, while thematic restaurants will be set up within the park. There will also be open spaces that can be customised to meet the requirements of event organisers.

Planet J, Sands Cotai Central, Macau

Targeted opening: Summer 2015

Target markets: China, Taiwan, South-east Asia and Europe

Unique selling points: Planet J is the world's first player-centric Live-Action-Role-Play (LARP) theme park.

"At Planet J you won't find a roller coaster, but it features out-of-the-world role-playing games, where players can physically act out the actions of fantasy characters, and the pursuing of goals and interaction with other adventurers between realistic and virtual settings," explained a spokesperson.

Connecting the players with the park is a mobile device called Magic Scroll, a personalised mobile gear that connects to over 200 whimsical games. Blending state-of-the-art technology and experiential storytelling, it will take players into a total immersive experience, from fun games to exhilarating quests for individuals, and grand adventures to dazzling performances for group challenges.

MICE applications: Planet J can be a unique venue for events or corporate functions, particularly for teambuilding or interactive events.

Event organisers and corporates can book the venue for exclusive use for a two-hour session. For longer sessions, bookings must be made at least three months in advance.

The Planet J team can also work with event planners to customise the venue and programme.



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Marketplace

One Farrer Hotel & Spa inspires innovation

Imagination becomes reality in One Farrer Hotel & Spa which has, not one, but a slew of inspirational ideas. First up is the audio and visual fibre-optic live feed, which can beam how lunch is being made by a chef working in the hotel's cooking studio, to the Grand Ballroom where guests can ask the chef a question or two about the ingredients or method of cooking. Video streaming connections from Farrer Park Hospital's 18 operating rooms to the hotel's conference centre are also available.

The 243-room five-star hotel is part of a mixed-use lifestyle complex, Connexion, which includes a medical centre. Another innovation is an electronic ordering system that allows guests to order any food or beverage from all the hotel's menus 24/7 and have it delivered to the room or as a takeaway – so wave goodbye to exorbitant room service prices and charges, and the often long wait before the room service order is fulfilled.

This hotel has a three-in-one concept: Urban Hotel rooms are suitable for both leisure and business travellers; Loft Apartments for extended stays, coming with fully equipped pantries and the majority offering duplex layouts; while an exclusive penthouse experience can be had at the Skyline Hotel & Sky Villas. Perched on level 20, the Sky Villas feature luxury amenities such as private outdoor courtyards, lava rock barbecue grills, personal wine cellars and jacuzzi pools.



The hotel is also targeting MICE business with the One Farrer Conference Centre. Its 698m² Grand Ballroom, which can sit up to 650 guests and be split into two sections, is equipped with three multimedia screens, touchscreen control panels for presenters, handheld Samsung interactive tablets for conference delegates and a smart light system for customised light projections.

RIMBA Jimbaran Bali opens Scenography Cooking School

Situated amid RIMBA Jimbaran Bali's vast gardens, Scenography Cooking School is a contemporary culinary destination that specialises in providing guests with an authentic Balinese cooking experience.

Guests may choose from two unique culinary programmes, one that includes a dynamic market tour and Balinese offering ceremony. Bali's markets, or *pasar*, are an integral component of daily life on the Island of the Gods. Accompanied by the cooking school's culinary team, guests receive a multi-sensory introduction to the basics of Bali's unique cuisine and hands-on experience with recognising Bali's exotic produce including turmeric, lemongrass, palm sugar, chili, and salam leaves.

The chef's menu includes three appetisers and three entrées. Upon reserving their space, guests may choose one item from each menu to prepare. Quintessential dishes include *gado gado*, minced duck in banana leaf, *sate lilit*, beef and prawn satay, grilled snapper wrapped in banana leaf, and *nasi goreng* seafood. Participants will also learn how to make two staple foundations of Balinese cuisine including basic Balinese *bumbu* sambal and *base genep* spice paste.

Housed within an open-air structure, adjacent to RIMBA Lawn and the new Orchard, Scenography Cooking School has eight top-of-the-line gas cooking stations and a long table crafted from recycled sailboat wood. A stunning preparation centre, artisan crafted with granite and hand carved wood, is highlighted with copper accents and custom lighting.

Each class includes a refreshing welcome drink and a delicious lunch. After the lesson, guests are presented with a beautiful certificate that may be framed to preserve the memory. Reservations are required at least 24 hours in advance.



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Destination Malaysia

A bargain hunter's paradise

The weakened ringgit and nationwide sales are compelling reasons for visitors to Malaysia, writes [S Puvaneswary](#)



Kasturi Walk alongside Central Market is popular with shoppers

To leverage the love for shopping among Asian and Middle Eastern travellers, which made up 91.2 per cent of Malaysia's tourist arrivals in 2014, the government and private sector have rolled out a slew of initiatives to encourage higher visitor spend.

The chief reasons that make Malaysia a value-for-money shopping destination is the weakened ringgit against major currencies as well as a hassle-free tourist refund scheme implemented at eight international airports since April 1, 2015. There are also duty exemptions on a wide range of merchandise like jewellery, cosmetics, fragrances and computers.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture has timed three sales periods to coincide with peak travel periods in Malaysia, namely the week when the annual Formula 1 Petronas Malaysia Grand Prix is held in April; the Middle East summer holidays (around mid-year); and the year-end holiday season. These nationwide sales periods are promoted by Tourism Malaysia to overseas markets.

Travel consultants too are benefiting from the nationwide sales periods. Adam Kamal, CEO of Rakyat Travel, has created shopping packages that coincide with the 1Malaysia GP Sale, 1Malaysia Mega

Sale Carnival and Malaysia Year-end Sale (from mid-November to January).

He said: "Tourists from the Philippines, Indonesia and Brunei have been very receptive to these three-day/two-night packages. We offer a range of accommodation in the Bukit Bintang area and airport transfers. Those who buy our packages come here only to shop, as savings can be as much as 70 per cent off normal retail prices."

Ally Bhoonee, executive director of World Avenues, a big player in the Middle East inbound market, said: "This recognition has helped the tourism industry to promote shopping more aggressively and especially now the weakened ringgit provides more bargains and reasons for tourists to visit Malaysia. At the same time, it brings more revenue into the country."

To make shopping in major areas more conducive for pedestrians, Kuala Lumpur City Hall built covered walkways linking shopping malls in the Bukit Bintang area with its surrounds in late 2014. Shoppers can now walk in comfort through a 4.5km covered elevated pedestrian walk that links Berjaya Times Square mall to Pavilion Kuala Lumpur through Sungei Wang Plaza mall.

Overseas visitors will also benefit from the Super Pass, a travel guide-cum-discount booklet. It was published in April and acts as a discount voucher book with savings of up to 70 per cent on retail, attractions and F&B.

Noraza Yusof, head of tourism, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, said City Hall is also looking at introducing shorter sales periods that coincide with international brands to increase sale impact. This will further cement Kuala Lumpur's position as a preferred shopping destination with a strong value-for-money proposition, she added.

Destination in numbers

4.9

The amount in billion of ringgit (US\$1.2 billion) that tourists had spent on shopping in Malaysia in 1Q2015, up 10.8 per cent against the same period in 2014. This is the first time that tourist expenditure on shopping has nudged accommodation spend off the top spot

28.1

The percentage of total tourist receipts for 1Q2015 that is made up by shopping spend

6.7

The average length of stay, in days, that tourists spent in Malaysia in 1Q2015, up from five nights during the same period in 2014. The top three markets in terms of length of stay are the Netherlands (11.7 nights), UK (11 nights) and Saudi Arabia (10.5 nights)

VIEWPOINTS

What more can be done to promote Malaysia as a shopping destination?



John Chan,
business
consultant, **Kris
International
Traveltours**

Malaysia should capitalise on the

Halal travel segment which has untapped potential, and highlight made-in-Malaysia products such as cosmetics, food and fashion merchandise. This will enhance Malaysia's image as a top Muslim travel destination.



Ganneesh Ramaa,
manager,
**Luxury Tours
Malaysia**

We need more premium outlets as they will give tourists

more shopping choices and greater convenience. We should also increase our shopping promotions to tap markets within a three-hour flight radius and capitalise on regional tourists looking for weekend getaways. With good low-cost carrier connections, travel is very affordable. Another plus point is that city hotels cater largely to business tourists on weekends, so there are plenty of rooms on weekends offering attractive rates.

WHAT'S NEW

1 SkyPark Regional Aviation Centre

SkyPark Regional Aviation Centre (RAC) in Selangor caters for aviation and non-aviation related events. Its hangars can be used for product launches, annual dinners and weddings. Global Kitchen, a subsidiary of Saujana Hotel, is the official caterer SkyPark RAC and operates 24/7 to ensure a seamless service.



From left: SkyPark Regional Aviation Centre; The St Regis Langkawi

2 Marine Life Laboratory

The Andaman, a Luxury Collection Resort, Langkawi, opened its Marine Life Laboratory in June to serve as a research lab for marine science and biology students who are keen on improving their understanding of coral reef ecosystems and effective artificial reef management. For resort guests, the facility offers an opportunity to learn more about marine life. Workbenches in the laboratory provide space for guests to have hands-on experience with coral transplanting.

ed products. This factory outlet shopping mall is than a 10-minute drive to Kuala Lumpur International Airport, making it perfect as a last minute shopping stop. Facilities include free baggage storage and a flight information display system to make sure shoppers do not miss their flights.

4 The St Regis Langkawi

Scheduled to open next month, The St Regis Langkawi is situated within an idyllic cove close to Kuah town, Langkawi's shopping and commercial centre. It is approximately a 20-minute drive from Langkawi International Airport. The resort will feature 85 well-appointed suites and three water villas, a spa, a swimming



pool, a gym and several function venues with access to expanded meeting facilities at the Langkawi International Convention Centre.

5 Borneo Convention Centre Kuching

Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCKK) will soon manage a catamaran and offer customised river packages to its clients. The catamaran, owned by the Ministry of Tourism Sarawak, is scheduled to be operational by 4Q2015, and will ply two routes – Kuching Waterfront to BCKK and from the Marina Jetty to Bako National Park. It can hold 40 pax in theatre-style on the lower deck and 30 in cocktail fashion on the upper deck.

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Destination Myanmar

Open for business this new dawn

The South-east Asian nation has been lingering in the shadows for decades. In order to help the country grow exponentially as a tourist destination, the infrastructure needs to be kept up to speed, reports **Michael Mackey**

Myanmar's tourism industry is growing by leaps and bounds



Myanmar is starting to emerge as a mass rather than a niche market destination. Although lingering problems with infrastructure remain, they are being addressed, industry sources have told the *Daily*.

"Myanmar is growing rapidly as a destination and has many emerging hot spots. In fact, the whole country is really South-east Asia's hot spot at present," said Paul Suvodip, regional director, revenue & marketing, Best Western International – Asia.

The traditional tourist route that takes visitors to Yangon, Mandalay, Bagan and Inle Lake has strengthened from around a million visitors in 2012 to an expected four-and-a-half, possibly even five million this year.

The tourist economy is also being supplemented by both new destinations and services, some of which are surprising for a country often held up for its Buddhist cul-

ture and political interest.

"Myanmar's beach resorts will grow in popularity in the coming years. Ngapali Beach on the west coast is a stunning long stretch of sandy beach, and the Myanmar government recently announced plans to allow new hotel developments in the idyllic Mergui Archipelago," Suvodip said.

"We expect to see these two destinations grow in stature among South-east Asia's leisure and MICE sectors in the years ahead."

This would mean a significant change in the market, which is currently made up of FITs and smaller ad-hoc groups. There's also "not much MICE yet", according to Lilli Saxer, director, Diethelm Travel Myanmar.

Saxer pointed out that change is happening and the tour market is expanding with activities such as hiking, river cruising and hot-air balloon rides. Overland travel options are also increasing.

In an explanation of where the market

seems to be heading towards, Thomas Carnevale, managing director, Asian Trails Tour, Myanmar, said: "We are pioneers for border crossing programmes, having operated one of the first official India-Myanmar tours. Currently, we are working on our new explore programmes – out of the ordinary tours for everyone."

Visitors come from all over the world, but in particular, Asian countries due to the easy access. Several sources have praised the Myanmar authorities, especially the Myanmar Tourism Federation, for adopting an e-visa facility, and for Thais, a no-visa programme. These sources have also noted the government's ability to see tourism as an economic motor, and able to maximise whatever resources they are given, wisely.

"They (the Myanmar Tourism Federation) represent Myanmar at trade shows such as ITB and WTM. (They also) have sales and marketing agreements with representatives overseas, and do the maximum they can with the funding they have available," explained Carnevale.

However, despite the growing optimism, there are certain problems.

The lack of international hotels and well-trained staff were examples cited by Saxer when asked about Myanmar's current infrastructure to cater to tourists.

Fortunately, help is on hand.

"Yangon International Airport and Mandalay International Airport are being upgraded. A number of rail projects, including the modernisation of the Yangon-Mandalay Main Line and the Yangon Circular Railway are being financed by Japan," said Philippe Battle, area general manager, Accor Myanmar.

Besides airports and roads, infrastructure also includes banking services.

At one point, Yangon had only a limited number of ATMs. This required travellers to pay hotel bills in cash, usually US dollar bills. This era seems to be drawing to a close as Battle pointed out that nine foreign banks will open branches within the next year – another sign that Myanmar is open for tourists and businesses.

"The changes in the past year or so have been considerable. MasterCard is now widely accepted. ATMs to dispense local currency are available and as recently as two weeks ago, I was able to use my Amex card," David Wray, senior director of business development and acquisitions, South-east Asia and Pacific Rim, Wyndham Group.

"Traffic is still troublesome but no worse than many Asian countries (and) the airport is undergoing redevelopment," he added.

VIEWPOINTS

How has Myanmar's tourist infrastructure improved in the last few years?



Lilli Saxer, director, Diethelm Travel Myanmar

We are actually quite happy that ATMs are now available in many major tourist destinations. Most hotels now also accept payment by credit card, with the exception of a few that are mainly guesthouses or small local hotels. Although, I would recommend travelling with enough US dollars to cover most personal expenses due to malfunctioning ATM machines.

Thomas Carnevale, managing director, Asian Trails Tour Limited, Myanmar

There are issues in the infrastructure, which is normal after 50 years of hardly any investment. The government is implementing the tourism masterplan with the help of international donor organisations and there are a wide number of ongoing infrastructure projects. They are now being implemented step by step but it will take time.

WHAT'S NEW



Le Cellier

1 Asian Trails

The opening up of Myanmar has allowed for Asian Trails to launch an adventurous overland tour from India.

The trip begins in Kohima, Nagaland, in north-east India, before crossing into Myanmar from Imphal, Manipur. It then goes to the heart of Burmese culture in Mandalay and Bagan before ending in Naypyidaw.

2 Hot-air balloon rides

Despite not being a cheap activity, hot-air balloon rides will probably be the highlight of a trip to Myanmar.

Rides are conducted by Balloons Over Bagan and are available at Bagan, a plain

covered with more than 2,000 temples. The tour, which happens at dawn, also offer a guided, interactive safety demonstration before take-off.

A Classic Service Flight costs US\$320 and a more spacious Premium Service Flight is US\$380.

3 Hiking tours

Appealing to the more active and adventurous, hiking tours can be arranged and can last from a day to a week.

For example, a standard 2N/3D tour from Kalaw to Lake Inle, ranges from US\$130 per person in a 10-member group with limited guiding, to over US\$420 for solo travellers with a full-time guide.

4 Le Cellier

In a sign of increasingly sophisticated palates, Novotel Yangon Max has just opened a 160-seater Le Cellier. The restaurant, open for lunch and dinner, offers authentic French cuisine with stunning views of the Shwedagon Pagoda. Wine lovers will delight in having a walk-in cellar with over 100 labels.

5 River cruising

For those who want to take it easy and go deeper into rural Myanmar, a river cruise down the Chindwin and Ayeyarwady Rivers, and their deltas, is a popular option.

Packages can be arranged with either Cruiseco or Pandaw.

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Destination Philippines

Missing the luxury connection

A lack of promotion and limited funding inhibit the country's luxury market growth, reports Rosa Ocampo



City of Dreams Manila is drawing the interest of wealthy travellers

When a group of travel consultants took up the cudgels and organised the Asia Premium Travel Mart (APTM) – the first high-end B2B tourism event in the Philippines – in May, it exposed major hurdles in harnessing the destination's immense potential as a luxury destination.

First and foremost was the lack of knowledge on the Philippines, which was what prompted Fe Abling-Yu, president of S8 Exhibition, to organise APTM.

"We have been attending luxury travel market shows abroad. The closest one in Shanghai is a huge show, but there are no Philippine sellers except (for) Eskaya, which is a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World and the Manila Peninsula, part of the Peninsula Hotels group," said Abling-Yu.

"We tell buyers to bring their clients to the Philippines and they ask, 'Where's the Philippines?'" she added.

However, owing to limited government funding, the private sector was forced to rely on themselves and pooled their own

resources for APTM, according to the show organisers.

"We lack government support," lamented Edwin Villanueva, director of S8 Exhibition, who added that despite being a Johnny-come-lately in the luxury market, the Philippines has huge potential to tap the luxury leisure, MICE and wellness segments.

On his part, Philippine Tourism Promotion Board (TPB), COO, Domingo Ramon Enerio III explained to the *Daily* that they had supported APTM financially.

The NTO chief is also in agreement with private sector sentiments that more marketing is needed when he said: "We have to be more aggressive with our combined efforts (on) the premium markets."

On a more positive note, travel consultants observed that the country is fast catching up in its cache of luxury developments, despite ongoing challenges such as the need for more infrastructure and upmarket properties outside of popular destinations like Manila, Boracay, Cebu and Palawan.

marine life while promoting community-based ecotourism programmes.

3 Surfin' Siargao

Siargao is the newest marine playground for leisure aficionados. It beckons with Cloud 9 surfing spot touted to be among the world's best, endless nature tripping in its islands, tropical forests and mangroves. And for the ultimate in barefoot luxury, Dedon Island Resort is the place to be with its villas built to blend with the surroundings, exclusive amenities and services to restore, pamper and invigorate the self.

4 Asian Cancer Institute

This latest addition to medical tourism is the country's first fully integrated cancer facility, a one stop multi-disciplinary cancer prevention and management facility where transformative medical expertise meets genuine compassion and care.

Asian Cancer Institute offers one price for locals and foreigners alike and is ac-

credited by foreign medical insurance companies. The Institute is within the Asian Hospital and Medical Center, a tertiary hospital accredited by the Joint Commission International, the world's most prestigious accrediting body for healthcare organizations.

International luxury hotel brands like City of Dreams, Conrad, Shangri-La, AccorHotels are coming into the country. "(These companies) won't be investing here if they didn't think that the country is ripe for premium travel," Abling-Yu pointed out.

Wilson Techico, vice president - business and product development of Uni-Orient Travel, which has been offering customised services for high-end travellers, is confident that given time, the Philippines will develop as a premium destination. "We now have luxury hotels, resorts and facilities that were absent five or 10 years ago," he said.

A growing number of destinations within the country are now becoming accessible, thanks to helicopter services and airlines like Skyjet and Air Juan which are targeted at high-end travellers.

Targeting premium travellers, who spend more and stay longer than average visitors, also reap higher dividends for tour operators, noted Shan David, president, Corporate International Travel.

Current luxury trends now include

VIEWPOINTS

What is currently being done to position the Philippines as a premium destination?



Cesar Cruz, president, Philippine Tour Operators Association

We have luxury properties coming into Metro Manila, Cebu, Boracay and Palawan. The airports are a setback

but hopefully these will all change starting this year. Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport will soon finish its refurbishment, while Mactan airport in Cebu will build a resort terminal. Caticlan airport in Boracay is also upgrading its capacity, and the airport in Busuanga (Palawan) is also being expanded. Tour operators are also introducing thematic tour packages for luxury, adventure and wellness travel.

Cheanne Lopez, marketing officer, Hotel Celeste and Best Western Boracay Tropics

The Philippines has no peg as a luxury destination. The Department of Tourism's marketing and promotions are very broad-based... Maybe it has to tweak its strategy to boost specific market segments like the luxury market. APTM helps to boost this market.



beach, culture and shopping sprees. Also becoming popular are men's leisure golf and gaming, especially with the opening of the two integrated resorts, Solaire Resort & Casino and City of Dreams Manila, observed trade players.

WHAT'S NEW

1 Shangri-La At The Fort, Manila

Shangri-La At The Fort Manila raises the bar on luxury in the metro's hotel scene when it opens end of the year. On the cards are 476 premium keys with a minimum size of 45m² each and 97 units of contemporary and elegant residences, column-free grand ballroom for up to 1,800 guests, 18 other multifunction rooms, Kerry Sports Manila and premium shops.

2 Caring interaction with marine wildlife

Kirschner Travel Manila and its nonprofit arm, Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines, recently launched customised tours allowing tourists to interact with marine wildlife such as dugongs, whalesharks, giant turtles and rays. What's unique about the tours is that they are led by marine wildlife experts and includes only destinations such as Donsol in Sorsogon, Tubataha Reef and Busuanga in Palawan that guarantee protection and respect for



From left: Interactions with marine wildlife; Siargao surfing hotspot

credited by foreign medical insurance companies. The Institute is within the Asian Hospital and Medical Center, a tertiary hospital accredited by the Joint Commission International, the world's most prestigious accrediting body for healthcare organizations.

5 Conrad Manila

The country's first Conrad Hotel marked

for opening in December will have 347 keys with a huge proportion of suites for business and leisure travelers. Located within the Mall of Asia complex with a sweeping view of the Manila Bay, Conrad Manila's mega-yacht shape boasts two ballrooms, meeting rooms, executive lounges, infinity pool, gym and spa facilities, two floors of high end retail stores, and roof deck restaurants.

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Sunny with a chance of more growth

South-east Asia's tropical beaches have no shortage of sunshine and is popular with travellers. We take a closer look at how four destinations in the region are faring

Phuket

By Michael Mackey

Performance in 1H2015

Phuket continues to log healthy growth, driven by strong Asian arrivals and spending, observed the island's hoteliers and tour operators.

"The first two quarters of the year have been very good for our hotels, (with) average occupancy 80 per cent and above, and RevPAR above 2,200 baht (US\$62)," a Best Western International spokesperson told *TTG Asia*.

Confirming the trend of higher occupancy and spend, Keith Won, director of sales & marketing, Anantara Phuket Villas, said: "The overall RevPAR has also shown good increases in line with the overall occupancy."

Following its relaunch, Amari Phuket saw a "superb" 1H2015 that accounted for the resort's best performance in 30 years, according to Pierre-Andre Pelletier, vice-president & area general manager - South Thailand, Onyx Hospitality Group.

Ianic Menard, Accor's vice president for sales, marketing & distribution in upper South-east Asia, attributes Phuket's growth to the "strong increase in intra-Asia travel" that is led by China, Australia and India.

"The increase in Chinese guests has buoyed the island through what is meant to be low season," Menard commented.

On the other hand, Europeans are in-

creasingly shifting from Phuket to other beach destinations like Krabi, Khao Lak and Koh Lanta, observed Laurent Kuenzle, CEO of Asian Trails.

"The image of Phuket is becoming one that is more focused on entertainment and preferences of Asian visitors," he added.

Outlook for 2H2015

Despite the recent Erawan bombing in Bangkok, hoteliers in Phuket are confident that growth on the island will continue. They are also watchful of the international economy but stay upbeat.

"We remain positive about the outlook for the rest of the year and expect to see a continued increase in occupancy and ADR," said Anantara Phuket Villas' Won.

Menard said that Accor is already seeing increasing bookings for Phuket, especially during the Christmas and New Year period. The MICE sector is expected to do well too.

"The cost of organising meetings, events and incentive travel programmes in Phuket are feasible with reasonable prices, so the island will continue to be a South-east Asian hub for MICE travellers. This sector will continue to be a significant source of revenue for stakeholders in Phuket," added Menard.

Improved infrastructure on the island is also contributing to the growth of arrivals. The airport is undergoing upgrading, while new shopping malls are also likely to increase the number of high-end tourists, sources said.

What's new

● **Keemala** This luxury villa property located near Kamala Beach is seen as a key part of the island's renaissance. The 38 pool villas are inspired by the way the island's early settlers built their homes.

In the pipeline

● **Cassia Phuket** Banyan Tree's newest brand Cassia will open in October this year. Located within Laguna Phuket in Bang Tao Bay, it will have 221 residences

and an additional 105 when a second tower is added in 2017.

● **Phuket International Airport** General improvements will be made and a private jet terminal added. When the 5.7 billion baht (US\$15.9 million) expansion is completed by February 2016, it will enable the airport to handle 12.5 million travellers a year.

Bintan

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Performance in 1H2015

The opening of Lagoi Bay in May has elevated the allure of Bintan island with its crop of resorts and lifestyle attractions.

According to Bintan Resorts International, director of marketing, Asad Shiraz, although year-on-year arrivals declined 2.5 per cent in 1H2015, the numbers in May and June climbed 9.2 per cent and 9.5 per cent respectively following Lagoi Bay's launch.

Shiraz said: "(Lagoi Bay) attracted both locals and visitors alike to (experience) the new activities. We hyped up our marketing campaigns as well for this opening to increase exposure and awareness."

This 1,300ha development consists of residences, shopping centres and five resorts. The Sanchaya and Swiss-Belhotel Grand Lagoi have launched, while MoUs were signed for new hotels to be managed under the following brands: Four Points by Sheraton, ibis Styles, Novotel, Dialog Hotel, Prime Plaza and Ambhara Hotel.

Lagoi Bay's opening also went hand-in-hand with that of the 60-outlet Plaza Lagoi Mall, with Indonesia's major retail operator Pasaraya as both anchor tenant and manager.

Outlook for 2H2015

The outlook for Bintan is upbeat with the opening of Lagoi Bay, which will be further complemented with the crop of din-

ing options and attractions coming online in the second phase of development.

Shiraz added: "The addition of these new hotels will significantly increase the rooms, activities and amenities available. Bintan will become an even more sought-after island destination and a twin destination with Singapore."

He is confident that the intensified marketing efforts, targeted primarily at Singapore, China and India markets, will "yield positive results as well".

For example, Bintan Resorts earlier partnered with Changi Airport Group to promote the twin-destination concept, particularly to the India market. Visitors from India heading to Bintan Resorts can now enjoy a S\$30 (US\$22) voucher while in transit at Changi Airport, along with a free Mangrove Discovery Tour.

Shiraz added: "The soon-to-be-implemented visa-free facility for 30 nationalities entering Indonesia via Bintan ports is also expected to give arrivals a lift."

What's new

● **Plaza Lagoi** Touted as Asia's first beach village mall, the 20ha Plaza Lagoi has the highest concentration of commercial and recreational activities on the island. A ferry check-in facility at Plaza Lagoi allows easy check-in of luggage and collection of boarding passes.

● **Swiss-Belhotel Grand Lagoi** Located next to Lagoi Beach Village, this 196-room hotel offers meeting facilities, a rooftop pool and shopping outlets.

● **The Sanchaya** Besides offering guests the romance of colonial elegance of a bygone era, this 30-key luxury resort boasts its own VIP lounge in the ferry terminal.

● **The Canopi** This 41 tent-suite resort offers the unique experience of glamping with modern amenities and furniture.

In the pipeline

● **Alila Villas Bintan** Set on a hillside location in Lagoi Bay, the 14.4ha property will comprise 12 three-bedroom beachfront residences and a boutique resort with 52 one- and two-bedroom guest villas.

● **Bintan Resorts International Airport**

Slated to open in 2017, the airport will have a 2.5km runway and can accommodate aircraft such as the Boeing 737 and Airbus 320, giving it an operational radius of about five hours – placing southern China and southern India within reach.

Bali

By Mimi Hudoyo

Performance in 1H2015

Bali's popularity as a beach destination continues to grow, with international visitor arrivals reaching nearly 1.9 million in 1H2015, up 9.4 per cent from 1.7 million the same period last year, according to data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS).

However, Horwath HTL reported a dip of five to 10 per cent in Bali's hotel occupancy. Matt Gebbie, director, Pacific-Asia of Horwath HTL, said: "Occupancy at lower priced hotels, particularly those with an average daily rate below US\$59, was the hardest hit."

Trade members attributed the occupancy drop to an oversupply of rooms. BPS data shows that Bali had 249 star-rated hotels with 28,811 rooms in 2014. This year, 30 more hotels are expected to open and add another 5,677 rooms.

Gebbie said: "The opening of new properties had an impact on hotel performance as there is greater competition. Besides, hotels don't open at peak performance and it takes time to ramp up, so this drags market averages down."

The domestic market also plays a big role in filling up rooms, but domestic arrivals at Ngurah Rai International Airport in the first five months (available data at press time) fell five per cent from the same period last year.

"(The) higher cost of (domestic) flights compared with other destinations negatively impacted domestic tourism," Gebbie reasoned.

Bali Airport's closures during the Mount Raung eruption in July also caused some traffic diversion from the destination. Ida Bagus Ngurah Wijaya, Bali chapter chairman of Indonesia Tourism Industry Association, said: "(The closures) took place during the school holidays, so travellers were likely to divert their trip to other countries."

"It was a force majeure and we do not expect any long-term impact. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Tourism has planned a recovery programme," he added.

Outlook for 2H2015

Industry players are expecting higher arrivals to Bali in the second half of the year.

Horwath's Gebbie said: "New direct flights from the Middle East will have a positive impact on accessibility (between Bali and) the world. The weak rupiah will encourage Indonesians to stay within the country and foreigners to visit. There is also optimism over the new visa-free entry regulations – time will tell."

The struggling Indonesian economy is likely to affect hotel performance though, opined Marc Steinmeyer, president director, Tauzia Hotel Management.

"The hotel projects we see today were planned three, four years ago, when the economy was booming. While there will be opening delays, developers will try their best to open their properties to avoid losing the land value," Steinmeyer said.

Gebbie added: "I fear that hotels will continue to drop rates in an attempt to capture demand. Many of the newer hotels are between a rock and hard place with revenues lower than budget and construction/land debts to pay."

"This will impact booking lead times as domestic guests, in particular, are aware of the situation and delay booking their rooms until the last minute (to land) a great deal," he added.

What's new

● **Surf & Turf Tjendana Corporation**, Bali launched a new beach club and amusement water park at Nusa Dua Beach. It offers the first surf rider in Bali along a space bowl and 6m-tall water slides.

In the pipeline

● **Rosewood Tanah Lot Bali** The group will mark its entry into Indonesia with its first property in Bali in 2017. The 12ha property will feature 80 suites, 27 villas and 29 Rosewood Residences.

Langkawi

By S Puvaneswary

Performance in 1H2015

Arrivals to Langkawi are generally stable, with the destination receiving close to 1.5 million international and domestic tourists in the first five months of 2015, a slight increase of one per cent compared with the same period in 2014.

Working in Langkawi's favour is the depreciated ringgit, which compels locals to visit the archipelago while making the



The Sanchaya's colonial-esque bathroom

destination comparatively cheaper than its regional competitors too.

The longhaul market in 1H2015 was a mixed bag of performance, according to inbound consultants *TTG Asia* spoke to.

Discovery Overland Holidays saw a 10 per cent increase in UK tourists from 2014, said Kingston Khoo, senior manager, product development and contracting.

"The British pound has appreciated and the UK economy has improved, (so) we think this resulted in renewed interest for the destination," he added.

Bookings from the UK and Central Europe during the summer months of July, August and September, traditionally the peak season for European arrivals to Langkawi, were strong, added Khoo.

For Diethelm Travel Malaysia, the German market to Langkawi decreased more than 10 per cent in 1H2015, a likely result of the two Malaysia Airlines disasters in 2014, as well as the weaker European economy, said managing director, Manfred Kurz.

Meanwhile, Andy Yow, director of sales and marketing at Vivanta by Taj - Rebek Island Langkawi, said Langkawi saw stiff competition in the first half of the year as many resorts in Phuket courted the European market with aggressive promotions.

"We started our own promotion in May 2015, which will run through to March 2016, for the Europe market."

"However, this promotion was too late for 1H2015 and we saw a four per cent dip in arrivals from the UK and Germany," he shared.

On the other hand, Langkawi is steadily building up its appeal to Chinese visitors.

Winnie Ng, deputy general manager, Pearl Holiday Travel & Tour, recorded a 60 per cent surge in Chinese arrivals

to Langkawi in 1H2015, with interest coming mainly from FITs and incentive groups.

Outlook for 2H2015

Looking ahead, the Chinese market is expected to do well for Langkawi although the Middle East and European markets appear more unpredictable.

Pearl Holiday's Ng does not think that a slowdown in the Chinese economy and the recent renminbi devaluation would impact arrivals, especially with a weakened ringgit, and predicts a good 2H2015 and 1Q2016.

Having welcomed a Perfect China incentive group of 2,000 pax to Langkawi in July, Sunflower Holiday's managing director Mint Leong is projecting "a 20 per cent increase in arrivals to Malaysia".

At press time, there were 62 confirmed charters from Xi'an and Chengdu in 2H2015, according to Rosnina Yaacob, tourism division manager at Langkawi Development Authority.

Diethelm Travel Malaysia's Kurz added: "Bookings from Germany looked better in the second half of the year, but it is still slower than 2014. The euro is still weak, thus prompting many holidaymakers to choose midhaul instead of longhaul destinations."

Ally Bhoonee, executive director of World Avenues, saw a "big drop" from the Middle East market mainly due to political instability in the Middle East, but also in part due to the EU granting Emiratis visa-free entry to Schengen zone countries which diverted some traffic away from Malaysia.

What's new

● **Langkawi International Convention Centre** Located adjacent to The Westin Langkawi Resort & Spa, the centre features a grand ballroom with a 1,000 pax capacity and seven meeting rooms.

● **Langkawi Art of Paradise 3D Museum** This three-storey museum at Oriental Village in Bura Bay showcases more than 100 interactive 3-D paintings.

● **Langkawi SkyDome** South-east Asia's first outdoor dome on top of Machinchang Mountain is accessible via the Langkawi Cable Car.

In the pipeline

● **St Regis Langkawi** Scheduled to open in November 2015, the resort will have 85 suites and three water villas. Each guestroom will also feature the signature St Regis Butler Service.

● **Ritz-Carlton Langkawi** The 150-room luxury resort at Pantai Kok will open in late 2016. The property will also have 42 villas and three swimming pools.



From left: The influx of new properties exerts a downward pressure on Bali's occupancy; Langkawi is a popular destination for tourists from the UK

Destination Hong Kong

Creative juices need to flow

As more FITs make footfalls in the city, tour experiences are becoming more diverse and localised. By Prudence Lui

Eager to tap the growing FIT trend in Hong Kong, both the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) and tourism trade have been striving to promote new experiences and tour ideas to woo visitors.

In 2012, the HKTB introduced the New Tour Product Development Scheme (NT-PDS) to encourage local travel agencies and tour operators to develop new and creative tours, subsidising up to a maximum of HK\$500,000 (US\$64,507) for marketing the products.

In 2015, the HKTB boosted the NT-PDS portfolio to 24 with the addition of five new tours, ranging from a three-hour walking tour in town to a six-day personalised package in Hong Kong and China.

Anna Cheung, trade development manager, HKTB, said: "All these tour experiences are encompassed by Explore Hong Kong Tours, which aim to showcase lesser-known facets of the city. They are available to B2B and B2C markets. For instance, the four-hour Tai Po Market Foodie Tour takes visitors to discover local snacks, while the Good Evening Kowloon walks visitors into the Yau Ma Tei area to explore local entertainment and culture."

Likewise, tour operators also see potential in attracting travellers with unique dining experiences.

Uni Tours' managing director David Luk said: "We partnered with hotel chefs to create fantastic tasting menus. After the meal, the chef would come out and present a certificate to diners who have eaten at the chef's table. This certificate is a memorable gesture which allows visitors can show to their friends at home and provides a word-of-mouth promotion."

"Instead of five-star premises, we opt-



Tours that promise local unique experiences are being rolled out to attract FITs

ed for mid-scale hotels so prices would be reasonable. So far, we have worked with Prudential Hotel in Tsim Sha Tsui whose executive chef is a member of La Commanderie Des Cordons Bleus," he added.

Also jumping on the creative experience bandwagon is The Peninsula Hong Kong have, which through its Tradition Well Served programme seeks out artisans of disappearing crafts in Hong Kong and takes guests to meet them. Guests are exposed to masters of art forms such as bamboo and flower displays, shadow puppetry and lion dancing. These interactive workshops are available in full- or half-day formats.

Sightseers (HK) managing director Linda Yuen believes that such tours help to diversify the city's offerings. She said: "Guests enjoy a localised experience and

as a cruise (consultant), I always share these new ideas with excursion managers onboard."

CTS International Science-Technology and Culture Exchange, director, Ng Hion, agreed: "However, it's hard to say if these new ideas really help because I don't know whether the traffic volume is huge. The government's support is vital as the city needs to explore more new attractions beyond Disneyland."

On the other hand, TourAsia, managing director, Alan Wu, is more ambivalent. He remarked: "These tour ideas are just old wines in new bottles. The walking tour in New Territories, for instance, has been done before."

"While HKTB keeps pushing (consultants) for new ideas, our expensive hotel rates scare visitors away. Therefore, it doesn't work," he added.

Destination in numbers

34.3 million

Total arrivals from January to July 2015. There was only one per cent growth due to various external factors like competition from neighbouring destinations and China's anti-corruption policy

4.5

The percentage decline in shorthaul traffic which suffered more while longhaul markets recorded a 1.2 per cent decrease. This may be attributed to the currency devaluation in Japan and South Korea, which drew a lot of regional traffic

85

The average hotel room occupancy, down from 90 per cent last year during the January to July 2015 period. This is because of dwindling overnight arrivals from key markets like China, which also experienced a 5.7 per cent decrease for the same period

VIEWPOINTS

Apart from creative tours, what should Hong Kong do in order to attract more FITs?



Michael Wu, deputy managing director, Gray Line Tours of Hong Kong

Hong Kong Tourism should organise more international events in order

to enhance reputation. For example, the first ever Cyclothon held in October 2015 surprisingly attracted many overseas visitors, who signed up and cycled on Tsing Ma Bridge – opened for the first time for a cycling event.



Christina Cheng, general manager, Harbour Plaza 8 Degrees

I think these new tour activities are very good as they help introduce the

historical, architectural and cultural sides of Hong Kong. This brings visitors to new attractions in addition to shopping and eating experiences. Apart from creative tours, I would suggest organising more mega annual events like Wine & Dine Festival and the Chinese New Year Night parade, which have been very successful.

WHAT'S NEW



From left: Scandinavian Airlines' A330 Enhanced; Grand Hyatt Hong Kong's Plateau Spa fitness studio



1 Grand Hyatt Hong Kong

Suite and club floor guests of the Grand Hyatt Hong Kong can now look forward to a refreshed Grand Club Lounge where all-day dining options and free-flow champagne is served alongside other exclusive amenities. Located on the 30th and 31st floor of the hotel, the luxurious and elegant lounge presents a panoramic view of Victoria Harbour through floor-to-ceiling windows that span over 4.6 metres.

Also new at the hotel is the revamped Plateau Spa's fitness studio which features an extensive new range of Life Fitness exercise equipment and classes. Guests can find specialised zones for free weights, strength training, abdominal exercises

and stretching. A new service offers complimentary and customised active wear for guests.

2 Scandinavian Airlines (SAS)

SAS inaugurated a non-stop flight to Stockholm on September 11, 2015, making it the only carrier that flies directly between Scandinavia and Hong Kong. This five-weekly flight takes about 11 hours each way and is operated using an Airbus A330 Enhanced.

3 London House

Gordon Ramsay has opened his second restaurant in Hong Kong. The 136-seater London House, situated in Tsim Sha Tsui

East, features a bar and a grill, as well as live entertainment. Take advantage of the waterside location and dine al fresco on the terrace. Taste classics from the grill or choose from signature dishes on the all-day British dining menu which include fish & chips, bangers & mash, and shepherd's pie.

4 Jetstar Pacific Airlines

Jetstar Pacific Airlines inaugurated direct services between Hong Kong and Hanoi in September 2015. This marks the first budget airline to travel this route. Scheduled to fly four times per week on Monday, Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday, the route uses a 180-seater Airbus A320.

Destination Sri Lanka

Battling for visitor business

Civil strife ended six years ago, but Jaffna is still fighting – this time, it is to earn tourism dollars. By Feizal Samath

Heritage-rich cities like Jaffna need more promotion to coax travellers to visit



malharan/2396.com

When the 500-seater train from Colombo pulls into Jaffna railway station every afternoon, some 50 to 75 foreign backpackers usually get off.

“The morning train to Jaffna has a sizeable number of western tourists,” Vipula Wanigasekera, general manager and CEO of Sri Lanka Conventions Bureau told the *Daily*. “These FITs normally explore the city using a motorcycle hired in Jaffna.”

That is a sharp contrast to the scene barely six years ago, where tourism in this war-torn region was almost non-existent. Located in Sri Lanka’s far north, Jaffna was once the epicentre of the country’s decades-long ethno-political conflict, enduring bombardments and heavy loss of life and property.

Now the historic Tamil city is waking up to a different picture. The heritage-rich city is receiving growing attention from intrepid travellers and foreign backpackers. Roads, malls and guesthouses have also sprung up since the civil war ended in 2009.

VIEWPOINTS

What can be done to entice more travellers to visit Jaffna?



A M Jafer, president, Chamber of Tourism and Industry Sri Lanka

There is a need to identify and develop the potential areas for tourism in Jaffna.

However, the most important aspect is in educating the local community on how they can earn and improve livelihoods. It is important that steps are taken to ensure the community benefits from tourism before actively promoting the destination.

The city’s infrastructure and accommodation have improved from a few rooms a decade ago to some 500 rooms now, although they are still not up to international standards.

Malraj B Kiriella, director general of the

S Paramanathan, president, Travel Agents Association of Sri Lanka

The standard of hotels needs to be improved. There are accommodation facilities with 10 to 20 rooms, and while the rooms are decent, they are not as good as in Colombo. Foreigners are seeking hotels with facilities and services similar to what is available in the capital or close to these standards.



Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, said the government is working on an integrated plan to develop and improve accommodation and attractions in Jaffna. “We have facilitated investments in new hotels and guesthouses in the city,” he said.

The authorities are currently planning to transform the city’s military-controlled airport to a civilian facility with flights from southern India, which is less than an hour away.

Meanwhile, the city’s first high-class property, the 55-room Jetwing Yarl from the Jetwing chain, is due to open in December. “(Jaffna) is becoming a popular destination but may need a little more promotion,” said Hiran Cooray, chairman of Jetwing Hotels Group. “Economic activity will soon take off and draw many travellers.”

To some extent that is already happening. Large DMCs like Aitken Spence Travels are urging foreign tour operators to include Jaffna in their Sri Lanka brochures, while foreign travel consultants have started visiting Jaffna and the north to familiarise themselves with the region’s facilities and sights.

“The industry wants to popularise Jaffna as it is a new destination and something different from the other often-visited locations,” said Nalin Jayasundera, managing director of Aitken Spence Travels, which handled 300-400 foreign visitors to Jaffna from March 2014 to April 2015.

Jaffna’s star attractions are its beautiful beaches, rich tapestry of food and culture, decades-old Hindu temples, Keerimalai natural water springs and Jaffna Fort built by the Portuguese.

The city is also well known for local wines prepared from large vineyards – a particular draw for French tourists. Telson Fernando, general manager at STP Holdings, which owns two boutique hotels in Jaffna under the Heritage brand, said: “French visitors are keen to see vineyards during the season.”

S Hariharan, managing director at the 30-room Subhas Hotel, the city’s oldest hotel, said that many tourists also visit the nearby Delft island to “look for the history of their ancestors”. The island has an abundance of Dutch-period artefacts and 1,000 wild feral ponies.

Even surrounding areas like Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Mannar are considered new attractions in Sri Lanka, many of which are unexplored territories for both foreigners and locals alike.

WHAT'S NEW

1 Garton's Ark

Boat restaurants have become a new fad in Colombo with the latest entry of Garton’s Ark, an air-conditioned floating restaurant with an open deck. Catering up to 70 pax, it offers five-star buffet meals and can be hired for a party inclusive of a two-hour ride along a canal in Nugegoda, a Colombo suburb.

2 Good Market

The Good Market is Colombo’s first organic market. Open every Saturday from 08.00 to 20.00, there are organic vegetables, books, curios, handicrafts, vegan desserts, bottled chutneys and cotton clothing on offer.

Located at the popular Colombo Race-



From left: Galle Face Green; Sri Lankan spices at Good Market

course, the organisers also have a Good Market organic and natural food shop nearby.

3 Galle Face Green

The Galle Face Green is Colombo’s popular seaside promenade developed during



British colonial times more than a century ago. To experience the local lifestyle, make your way to the Galle Face Green in the evening and watch kids flying kites, people playing cricket or families on a day out. There are also numerous food stalls along the seafront.

4 Nelum Pokuna Art Street

The Nelum Pokuna Art Street is the capital’s only space where artists are allowed to display their paintings on the pavement along a tree-lined avenue beside Viharamahadevi Park. Look closely and there are some great works of art with prices ranging from between 2,000 Sri Lankan rupees (US\$15) to 20,000 rupees.

5 Pinnawala Open Air Zoo

Sri Lanka’s first open air zoo recently opened at Pinnawala near Kandy, about 75km east of Colombo. The zoo is also close to the popular Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage. The 17.8ha site has leopards, bears, deer and crocodiles, along with many other native animals.

Spotlight on communities

Thailand's CBT initiatives are driven by a rising interest in sustainable tourism and authentic experiences. By [Greg Lowe](#)

TAT lends its support to CBT initiatives such as the water-based community of Amphawa in Samut Songkhram



Travel consultants are incorporating more community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives in their Thailand itineraries, driven by increased demand for more authentic cultural experiences from clients as well as a growing interest in sustainable travel.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is also bringing increasing support to the CBT sector. Part of its 2015 *Discover Thainess* campaign focuses on the so-called 12 Hidden Gems, provinces renowned for their unique history, culture and lifestyle, which includes projects such as Ban Nam Chiao Community in Trat, Klong Rua Community in Chumphon, Klong Noi Community in Surat Thani and Ban Bang Phlab Community in Samut Songkhram.

TAT has expanded its support for CBT beyond marketing to include a number of other initiatives. Its Green Community (under the *7 Greens* project) and Thailand Tourism Awards have been developed to encourage entrepreneurs to improve product standards. The NTO has also set up the Thailand Community Based Tourism Institute to help establish guidelines for related products, which a spokesman said was key to the sector's development.

CBT projects should be assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure the sustainable development of the local communities, said Graham Read, sustainability and responsible tourism manager at Khiri Group.

"Many products in Thailand are marketed as CBT, but aren't at all. Just because tourism occurs in a community doesn't mean it's CBT," he said.

"There is confusion that CBT is 'responsible tourism'. CBT can be 'responsible' but this is not always the case. The

quality of CBT should be judged by the quality of the product and the benefit to the community as a whole."

Another core challenge is navigating the fine line between providing an authentic experience of traditional life in a community and supporting a product which could actually hinder local development, said Soren Wettendorff, product development director, Destination Asia Thailand.

"In many people's view, not least some NGOs, CBT has to be a primitive experience, almost like an expedition into the agonising everyday life of poor people," he said. "(Too many people think) if it does not look poor and worn out it is not CBT. To me this (perception) is like trying to keep the population underdeveloped."

Successful CBT projects should become financially sustainable and self-funding after their set-up phase, he elaborated, and both the industry and tourists alike should become more accepting of local communities achieving the aspirations of the wider society at large.

Many DMCs and travel consultants, including luxury specialists, are currently marketing CBT as elements of an itinerary rather than the focus of an entire trip. The trade also needs to be selective about the source targets and demographics to which it markets such products.

"CBT in Thailand is becoming more popular, but not for all markets," said Read. "For Khiri Travel, CBT is generally more popular with the young European market (Millennials) interested in soft adventure; it's less popular with the American market. There also tends to be a perception amongst baby boomers that CBT cannot be associated with comfort."

Wettendorff said community initiatives

focused on wildlife and nature are often more successful and easier to sell than those offering cultural experiences.

"When it comes to direct interaction with local communities, I find that it's a lot harder for people in general to handle," he said. "The guests are afraid of being annoying to the local people and locals being afraid about not pleasing their 'donors' in the right way."

Yann Gouriou, founder and managing director of Unicorn Hospitality, which manages Maekok River Village Resort in northern Thailand, said using a more conventional business, such as a hotel which works with the wider local community

can be effective for developing CBT.

Maekok River Village Resort, in part due to its relatively remote location, has always worked closely with the local community "both as (a place of employment for locals), an education centre and a resort offering tours and educational programmes for students and hotel guests alike," he said.

The property has also helped support local schools, raising more than 20 million baht (US\$568,700) for some 150 projects over the past 11 years, and has developed strong links with a weaving cooperative run by Shan women in the nearby village of Ban Mai Mok Cham.

VIEWPOINTS

What are the challenges and opportunities in community-based tourism?



Sugree Sithivanich, deputy governor for marketing communications, Tourism Authority of Thailand

In enabling rural communities to develop tourist attractions, it is pivotal that their operations are constantly monitored to ensure (high) standards as well as to prevent unsustainable overexposure. This goes back to our ongoing activities to promote the *7 Greens* and the Thailand Tourism Awards, as well as the activities under the Thailand Community Based Tourism Institute.

Graham Read, sustainability and responsible tourism manager, Khiri Group

CBT projects are often set up with a lot of funding and goodwill. However, when the funding and technical support discontinue, the project will not survive if it isn't in demand. Having the private sector involved in the set-up can dictate how desirable they are in the future... Most CBT projects are located in rural areas where hospitality and business skills may be lacking, therefore many initiatives lack a solid business plan as well as marketing expertise.



WHAT'S NEW

1 Andaman Discoveries

Andaman Discoveries run a number of tours involving the Moken ethnic community living in and around Koh Surin National Park.

The business works with the nomadic community to provide education, fun-packed trips around the area, all of which present the unique culture and craft traditions of the Moken. Proceeds from the private tours are donated to the Moken Community Fund to help fund community improvements, health emergencies and elderly care.

2 Maekok River Village Resort

This family-friendly 36-room ecolodge located a few hours outside Chiang Mai provides a window into rural life along the Maekok River. The resort also features an education centre and arranges a number of eco and cultural activities involving local communities. Camping is available for larger groups and school trips.

3 Ban Bang Phlap Community

Winner of the Thailand Tourism Awards in 2010 and 2013, this agro-tourism project offers daily activities and homestays. Located in Samut Songkhram, the traditional village of teak houses surrounded by fruit orchards is a short drive from the popular Amphawa floating market.

The local women have become fa-

mous for their homemade herb sweets. More importantly, they are pioneering organic farming methods and the village is famous for its rare fruits species.

4 Baan Mae Kampong

This community initiative near Chiang Mai was started in 1999, mainly due to the decline in demand for fermented tea production. Since then, the number of homestays has expanded from five to 12 properties.

A host of activities for day-trippers and overnight groups of up to 60 pax are available, including locally-guided treks, cultural shows and village sightseeing.

Maekok River Village Resort



Moken experiences at Koh Surin with Andaman Discoveries



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Slumbering village awakens

Toraja is luring tourists back with agro-tourism and cultural experiences now that peace has returned. By Mimi Hudoyo

Homestays in Toraja are being developed for visitors to better understand the culture

itineraries, wiping the destination off the tourism map.

Toraja also subsequently failed to attract the rising domestic and regional markets, partly because of the sensitivity of some markets towards death-related attractions.

In 2012, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy established the Toraja DMO, a destination revitalisation programme, with the assistance of Swisscontact. Toraja DMO is now leading the developments taking place in Tana Toraja Regency, the southern part of Toraja.

Tri Laksono Juliharto, project officer for destination development at Swisscontact, said: "Currently, only 30 per cent of tourist attractions in Toraja is in Tana Toraja, while the rest are in North Toraja. This gives a chance for Tana Toraja to develop nature-based tourism products. While culture is its major attraction, our survey showed that nature is also a strong attraction of the destination."

Luther Barrung, chairman of Toraja DMO, said: "The southern part of Toraja, which has large plateaus surrounded by mountains, has great potential to develop agro-tourism. Pango-Pango, for example, is developed for agro-tourism around tamarillos, passion fruits and vegetables while Sarambu Assing is known for its waterfalls and coffee plantations. Toraja arabica coffee is internationally known and we want to develop an attraction around there."

In the North Toraja Regency, where most attractions are located, upgrading of the infrastructure and facilities such as food and drink stalls, and public toilets will be rolled out over the next five years.

Juliharto said Swisscontact was assist-

ing the destination in creating a campaign that will change its image, highlighting not only "the other side of Toraja" like Tongkonan – a Torajan traditional house – but also the philosophy behind it.

"Today, there needs to be more interaction between travellers and the local people. (By) experiencing their daily lives, (visitors can better) understand the culture," Juliharto said.

Barrung agreed: "We are developing homestays, so that travellers can stay and experience the local culture and way of life, while the local people will benefit directly.

"Torajans produce palm wine called *ballo*. The Ministry of Tourism has started providing technical assistance for the locals to produce *ballo* in a more hygienic way. Visitors will be able to visit the plantation, learn about the winemaking process and enjoy the drink," he added.

Meanwhile, Johan Tangke Salu, chairman of Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association North Toraja Chapter, is encouraging hotels to relaunch in Toraja.

"A lot of people have left tourism business since the industry declined... With the entry of fibre optic to Toraja, we are training hoteliers about Internet usage and channeling them to OTAs. We have started to see some results."

A new airport with a 2.4km runway is being built in Buntu Kunyi. Slated to open in 2017, the airport will help to improve accessibility, as the nearest airport in Makassar is an eight-hour drive away. Tourism stakeholders are also talking to Garuda Indonesia and Citilink to launch services from Makassar to Lagaligo Airport in Bua, Palopo, which is about a two-hour drive away to Toraja.

VIEWPOINTS

What must be done to sell South Sulawesi as a tourist destination?



Ng Sebastian,
managing
director, Incito
Tour, Makassar

Many travellers, even from neighbouring countries, do not know where

we are and what we have to offer. Before we participate in travel marts and sell the destination, we need to create awareness. This is something that the regional government and private sector cannot do alone. We need the central government to conduct fam trips for tour operators and the media from different countries to visit.

Ilsa Sopamena,
general manager,
Caraka Travelindo
Tour & Travel
Services, Makassar



In the past, we used to rely on (longhaul) inbound tourism alone. We should develop new products beyond Toraja. Around Makassar alone, we can promote the TransStudio theme park, water parks, Samalona Island where you can snorkel and dive, and the Karst Maros, the second biggest karst area in the world.

Toraja in South Sulawesi is striving to put itself back on the international tourist map after lying dormant for some 15 years.

Death is celebrated with much excitement and festivities for the Torajans, who practise elaborate funeral rites and carve burial sites into rocky cliffs. This unique culture and tradition had been a major draw for Western tourists who dominated arrivals to Indonesia in the 1990s.

However, following the race riots in Indonesia and the Poso riots in Central Sulawesi in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the European market dipped and Toraja was scrapped off from tour operators'

WHAT'S NEW

1 Mandapa

On September 15, Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, opened its doors. Boasting 35 luxurious suites and 25 pool villas, the property offers individually-tailored spiritual, wellness, health and detox programmes, as well as activities, to suit travellers of all ages.

Named after the entrance to a traditional Hindu temple, Mandapa has four restaurants and lounges. Dining Beyond, an exclusive culinary journey, will allow guests to dine in a special location within the Reserve.

2 Jamie's Italian

Jamie's Italian has opened its first 220-seat restaurant in Indonesia, on Bali's Kuta Beach. The brand is known for its genuine Italian dishes with that characteristic cheeky Jamie twist.

Guests can sit on the street-facing terrace, and enjoy an ice-cold local beer or a lovely glass of white from the Italian-dominated wine list and watch the world go by. The large bar on the ground floor is packed with Italian spirits like limoncino and grappa, and will also serve up cocktails.

3 Flores Exotic Tours

Photography enthusiasts on the Komodo



From left: Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve; Komodo National park

Photography Tour will now get the opportunity to get up close with the Komodo Dragon and take pictures of them, and other flora and fauna.

Launched by Flores Exotic Tours, some activities in the itinerary include capturing the sunrise on Padar Island, climbing Sulphurea Hill and Frigate Hill (where a magnificent view across the islands, bays and beaches awaits) and strolling along the unique Pink Beach.

4 Bali Adventure Tour

Go on a helicopter ride and obtain a bird's-eye view of Bali and Lombok with Bali Adventure Sky Tour.

The newly launched tour can take up to six passengers per ride on a Euroco-

per B2 helicopter. There are fixed tour programmes, such as Kintamani Volcano flight, Bedugul Lake and Gili Islands/Rinjani, but customised adventure flights are also available.

5 Aneka Kartika Tours Surabaya

Aneka Kartika Tours Surabaya has launched tour programmes centred around annual cultural festivals in Indonesia.

This includes the Waisak (Vesak) day celebration, the Holy Week (Maundy Thursday and Good Friday) in Flores, and Balinese celebrations like the Galungan and Kuningan. Learn about the religious celebrations and visit places of interests in the area.

Destination in numbers

5.5 million

Visitor arrivals to Indonesia between January and July, a 2.7 per cent growth over the same period last year. The global economic situation and the Bali airport closures due to the eruption of Mount Raung are said to have dampened arrival growth

20

The percentage of increase of arrivals from China between January and July over the same period last year. The number of arrivals in the first seven months this year was 658,690 while last year was 548,933. China was the best performing country for Indonesia in terms of growth rate this year

46

The number of hotels to open in Bali this year and next, contributing a total of 7,320 rooms across all categories. Even more are coming up, with STR Global data showing 93 hotel projects in the pipeline until 2020, with a total 14,656 rooms expected

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Singing the steel rail blues

The oft-overlooked Hokuriku region is now more accessible thanks to a new Shinkansen route, reports [Julian Ryall](#)



The northern coast of Japan is now within easy reach thanks to a newly-opened Shinkansen line

The advice that “If you build it, they will come” worked for Kevin Costner’s character in *Field of Dreams*. And it’s working in the Hokuriku region on the northern coast of Japan, where the country’s newest Shinkansen line started operation in March, opening up an area that was previously neglected by travellers from both the domestic market and further afield.

The Hokuriku Shinkansen Line heads north-west out of Tokyo before traversing the mountainous spine of the country and emerging on the coastal plains

of Toyama Prefecture. The new 328km line, from Nagano to Kanazawa, in Ishikawa Prefecture, opened on March 14 this year, with a further 121km extension to Tsuruga due to be completed by April 2023. The impact on the tourism sector for cities on the new route has been instantaneous.

“With the opening of the Shinkansen, access has improved and people feel closer to Toyama,” said Hitoshi Mizouchi, director, international tourism section, Toyama Prefectural Government.

“More visitors are now coming to experience

Toyama’s superb natural environment, fresh seafood and food from our mountain regions, as well as to relax in our hot springs.”

The hot springs of the famous Unazuki district have seen a 50 per cent increase in visitors during the April to May period from the previous year, while the Fugan Suijo Line cruise ship firm has seen bookings up 10 per cent and visitors to Zuiryujii Temple up 140 per cent.

Thanks to concerted promotion efforts, the majority of the visitors are from other parts of east Asia, including

Taiwan, Hong Kong, China and South Korea, Mizouchi said.

“Recently, the number of visitors from South-east Asian countries, such as Thailand and Indonesia, is increasing, although travellers from Europe and North America represent a relatively small share of the market,” he added.

One of the most famous tourist destinations in Toyama – and, arguably, one of the top sights in the country during winter – is the Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route. Visitors use cable cars, buses and ropeways on different stretches of the route, climbing some 1,975m over the length of the 25km route from Tateyama, Toyama Prefecture to Ogizawa, Nagano Prefecture.

The highlight of the route is the stretch of road with towering 20m-high snow walls on both sides. Known as the Yuki-no-Otani (the Great Snow Canyon), the route opens in April and closes again when it snows in November.

According to Hiroshi Tanaka from the international sales centre of Tateyama Kurobe Tourism Corp, some 375,400 visitors explored the Alpine Route between April and June this year, an increase of eight per cent, or 26,300 visitors, from the same period in 2014.

“About 36 per cent of our visitors are from abroad and so far this year, we have had 136,300 foreign tourists, up from 6,400 last year,” he said.

On July 1, Japan Railways introduced a new service, providing a package of tickets on the Shinkansen, local buses and accommodation in Gokayama. Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list, many of the traditional houses are 300 years old. With new infrastructure and improved connectivity, a tourism boom is clearly just around the corner for the region.

VIEWPOINTS

What is being done to attract more overseas visitors to the Hokuriku region?



Hitoshi Mizouchi, director, international tourism section, Toyama Prefectural Government

We have already invited foreign travel (consultants) to come to the region to see what we have on offer and we are working with them to draw up new travel plans for their clients. We are also proactive in taking part in travel fairs and exhibitions in Japan and overseas, and we believe that will be effective. The other approach is to work with the media to get the region’s name better known.



Kiyonori Ogawa, director, inbound promotion department, Japan National Tourism Organisation

We are making a great deal of effort to promote Hokuriku among foreign visitors and are working very closely with representatives of the region to get our message across. The Alpine Route was already well-known among foreigners, but since the new Shinkansen route opened earlier this year, we have seen a surge in interest. We are looking to build on that and hope that people take away great experiences to tell their friends.

WHAT'S NEW

1 Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo

The five-star Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo has unveiled its new event facilities on the 47th floor, following a month-long renovation. The five banquet rooms on the level were updated with new interiors, while Akane room was expanded from 45m² to 65m² and Aozora room was fitted with improved lighting systems. Works were also done to the foyer, karaoke room entrance and restrooms, as well as the banquet rooms on the lower levels which now offers wireless and local area network facilities.

2 Mitsui Outlet Park Hokuriku Oyabe

The first large-scale retail park in the region, Mitsui Outlet Park Hokuriku Oyabe, opened on July 16 this year. It boasts 173 shops, including 10 outlets opening in the country for the first time. With overseas visitors in mind, the park also has a prayer room,



free Wi-Fi hotspots, foreign currency exchange machines and multilingual aids.

3 The Westin Rusutsu Resort

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide will launch its first ski property in Japan when The Westin Rusutsu Resort opens in Hokkaido’s Rusutsu region in December.

Located in the northernmost region of Japan, the resort sits close to a number of mountain ranges, slopes and ski operations. It will feature 210 keys, including suites that can contain up to seven beds. Amenities such as a hot spring,

sauna, outdoor baths, tennis courts and a gym are also available, as are three dining venues offering a variety of food options, plus more than 110m² of meeting room space.

4 Hokuriku Area Pass

Local railway operator JR West has introduced a Hokuriku Area Pass for travellers holding foreign passports. Valid for four consecutive days, it costs 5,500 yen for adults and 2,750 yen for children when purchased in Japan. Ticket holders can enjoy unlimited travel on unreserved seats in the region just by showing it at the ticket barrier.



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The Kayana Indonesia's Magdalena Yoseva, The Samaya Bali's Ray Clark, Santika Indonesia's Cita Dewantoro and Yenny Susanty



Best Western International - Asia Thailand's Olivier Berrivin and Paul Suvodip (centre) and team welcome delegates



H S Travel International Hong Kong's Hazen Tang

TTG Asia pictorial special



Guam Visitors Bureau's Nakisha Onedera and Mark Manglona



One Farrer Hotel & Spa Singapore's Jessie Khoo-Gan

Catch all the action in this four-page spread snapped by *TTG Asia Daily's* photographers, Eugene Tang and Richard Lai



Tourism Authority of Thailand Pattaya Office's Suladda Sarutilavan, Provincial Administration Organization of Chonburi's Vitaya Khunplome, Tourism Authority of Thailand's Yuthasak Supasorn, Srisuda Wanapinyosak and Kajorndet Apichartrakul



Above: Plaza Premium Group Hong Kong's Song Hoi See and team are extremely excited to meet buyers



Right: The South Beach Singapore's Jenny Soo, Shanghai Airlines Tours International (Group)'s Hou Yun and The South Beach Singapore's Helen Yu

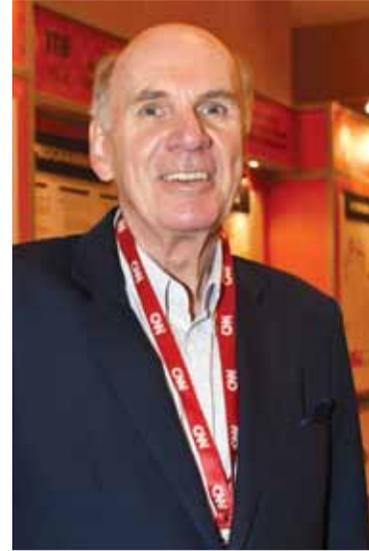
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Southern Star Hotel Thailand's Ninda Olanvoravuth and
CAS Asset Phuket's Tanakrit Dararattanaroj – see page 3



Innovation Norway's Per Holte



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CVBS Australia's Karen Jepson



Bravo Tours Shanghai's Mathieu Lin



Google Asia Pacific Singapore's Venkat Chandramoeshwar and Google China's Kevin Wang



Intas Destination Management Philippines' Teresita Henderson and Marina Bay Sands Singapore's Veronica Orosa



Joint Wisdom China's Edward Sun, Trust You Singapore's Frederick Wong and Joint Wisdom China's Jeremiah Chen



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Office National du Tourisme Luxembourg's Liz Moris, Luxembourg City Tourist Office's Martine Voss, Ministry of Economy Luxembourg's Gilles Scholtus, Luxembourg City Tourist Office's Chantal Flammang and Luxembourg City Trade Association Yannick Majerus



Tuniu China's Zhu Shan Shan, Bao You Bin and Rex Shang

Early birds at ITB Asia



Sun Far Travels & Tours Myanmar's Sett Eindray Maw Tun, May Thu Ko, Win Pa Pa Khine and Zin Nwe Aye



Orange Tours and Trips India's Devinder Sharma, Yatra Exotic Routes India's Pushp Raj, Aayan Journeys India's R Kumara Guru and Yatra Exotic Routes India's Dashmeet Dheer



Seoul Tourism Organization's Nina Kang, Maureen O'Crowley, Grace Kim and Jessica Cho



Worldhotels Singapore's Jas Egalon, Worldhotels India's Akshay Anand and Worldhotels Singapore's Monica Tan



Rex Hotel Saigon's Pham Cong Dung, Gina Bui Thi Minh Tam, Ho Tram Strip Vietnam's Xuan An Nguyen and Rex Hotel Saigon's Huynh Tu Quyen



Amkor Travel & Tours Philippines' Marianne Malinao-Tismo and Jojit Tismo, and Asian Holidays Intertours Services Philippines' Eleonor Aycardo-Tismo



Jabil Malaysia's Jenny See and Hermes-Epitek Corp Malaysia's Grace Teh



Adventure Lombok Tour's Supratman Samsi



The Ultimate Travelling Camp India's Mandeep Kaur and Ichcha Dhupia



Diversity Tourism Germany's Thomas Bomkes



Vienna Tourist Board's Elisabeth Sissi Woschnagg



Bhutan Tourism Corporation's Khandu Yeutsho



Southern Breeze Vietnam's Phil Maney



Jayakarta Hotels & Resorts Indonesia's Ellies Halim

TTG Asia pictorial special

It's showtime!



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Darussalam Holdings Brunei's Mohammad Wafi Haji Kudil, Haji Mahmud bin Haji Mohamed and Nuratiqah Abdullah



Chongqing Overseas Tourism Group China's Fan Wei and Temasek Polytechnic Singapore's Rachael Tan, Angeline Chin and Chew Kian Beng



Sentosa Leisure Management Singapore's Lim Suat Jien and team invite you to experience the fun island life



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The Kowloon Hotel Hong Kong's Ice Cheng and Harbour Grand Kowloon Hong Kong's Liz Mok



Approach one of our roving hunks or pretty ladies on the exhibition floor to obtain a copy of the **TTG Show Daily** hot off the press!



The Jayakarta Bali's I Wayan Waras, Jayakarta Hotels & Resorts Indonesia's Ellies Halim, The Jayakarta Suites Komodo-Flores Indonesia's Inri Da Costa and The Jayakarta Lombok's Cherry Abdul Hakim



JTB Singapore's Dennis Law, Travelmania Singapore's Cecilia Teo and Global Journey Holidays India's Naresh Chhatola



The ribbon-cutting ceremony by Singapore trade and industry minister S Iswaran, World Travel & Tourism Council's chairman Michael Frenzel and Messe Berlin's CEO Christian Goke that signifies the official opening of ITB Asia 2015. Sellers and buyers, are you ready?

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Miami, Florida

ATTRACTIONS, ENTERTAINMENT, NIGHTLIFE

LOVE THE BIG CITIES

There is excitement, amusement, entertainment, dining, shopping and interesting neighborhoods to discover

When it comes to pop music who does not know **Taylor Swift**? The good news is the **NYC & Company** recently announced the pop star's appointment as Global Welcome Ambassador to those who have an interest in her music and New York City.

Times Square and the New Year's Eve party is THE place to be to catch Taylor Swift and join about a million people in the heart of Manhattan to ring in the New Year and watch the ball drop from the roof of One Times Square.

The New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square dates back to 1904, with the first held to commemorate the official opening of the new headquarters of The New York Times.

Popular spots to watch the action are around **43rd Street and Broadway** and the crowds can reach all the way to **Seventh Avenue and 59th Street**.

Downtown New York City is the southern-most part of the island of Manhattan and where visitors can find the **World Trade Center site, Wall Street Financial District** and the many

skyscrapers that make up the city's beautiful skyline.

Relax in **Battery Park** before heading south of Canal Street to **Chinatown**, one of the oldest ethnic Chinese enclaves outside of Asia, and wander around **SoHo, Greenwich Village, Little Italy, the Garment District, Midtown West** as well as chic **Chelsea**.

Apart from its world-famous beaches, **Miami**, in Florida, is the U.S. gateway to Latin America.

The flamboyant city offers an intriguing blend of American, Latin American and Caribbean cultures and this is reflected in the interesting cuisine visitors can find.

Miami is also the cruise capital of the world, handling close to five million passengers every year. Miami Beach, across the waters of Biscayne

Bay, is home to glamorous **South Beach**, famed for its colorful art deco buildings, white sand, beachfront hotels and trendsetting nightclubs.

Miami is also family-friendly and those traveling with children can enjoy free activities at the Miami Children's Museum.

Fort Lauderdale, also in Florida, is known as the Venice of America for its expansive canal system. Located in Broward County, it is famous for its beaches, arts, culture and events.

Visitors can enjoy shopping on Las Olas Boulevard, take a gondola ride on the canals or its historic riverfront.

Take a cruise along the intra-coastal waterway and see how the rich live with luxury hotels, mansions and yachts dotting **Millionaires Row**.



For something more down-to-earth, visit the preserved 1900s Stranahan House furnished with antiques of the era.

Or follow the red brick road of Riverwalk, the landscaped park, to the Arts and Entertainment District.

Away from the **Las Vegas Strip** is another side to the city where it is less crowded and visitors can enjoy free nighttime entertainment in Fremont Street.

Lined with vintage hotels, restaurants, bars and souvenir shops spanning the four-block corridor is a giant digital screen, the Viva Vision canopy, and a must-see is the **Fremont Street Experience**.

The canopy is 90 feet above the ground and spans 1,500 feet in length, roughly the size of five football fields.

The screen contains about 12.5 million synchronized LED lamps, including 180 strobes and eight robotic mirrors per block, and the experience is beyond anyone's imagination.

The average Viva Vision light show is six minutes long and includes A Tribute to Queen, KISS Over Vegas, Bon Jovi's Cosmic Concert, and the newest show, The Who - Miles Over Vegas.

Stay on for the lively atmosphere and band performances and dive into one of the wallet-friendly eateries before heading back.

Los Angeles is chock-full of options for everyone. From **Disneyland** in Anaheim to the **Sunset Strip** in West

Hollywood, the **Farmers Market and The Grove**, the **La Brea Tar Pits**, **Universal City Walk**, and the **Kodak Complex**, there is always something to see and do in this bustling city. **Knott's Berry Farm** is one of the most-visited attractions in the U.S. and makes a great day out for the whole family.

Visitors can also have a fun time taking one of the many studio tours to see how movie magic is made and imagine being an extra on the set.

Popular movies have also used San Francisco as the backdrop and movies have been made about **Alcatraz Island**, located in the **San Francisco Bay** and 1.5 miles offshore from the city.

It was developed with facilities for a lighthouse, military fortification, military prison and federal prison.

Today, the island's facilities are managed by the National Park Service as part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

It is open to visitors who can reach the island by ferry from **Pier 33** near

Fisherman's Wharf.

Fisherman's Wharf is also where the **Ghirardelli Square Chocolate Festival** takes place.

It is not only for chocoholics and those with a sweet tooth looking to indulge in chocolate-covered strawberries, decadent mousses, brownies and other indulgences.

The two-day chocolate celebration features more than 50 vendors, cooking demonstrations by top dessert professionals, a Silent Auction and the popular Chocolate & Wine Pavilion. Profits from the event go to charity.

For music lovers, the two-week long **San Francisco Jazz Festival**, held in summer, features more than 40 big-names and past acts have included well-known musicians like Herbie Hancock, Dianne Reeves and Juan De Marcos and the Afro-Cuban All Stars. There is also the **SFJAZZ Summerfest** in South Bay at the Stanford Shopping Center in July and August and at Levi's Plaza off Embarcadero in September.

Florida offers plenty of sightseeing and shopping



Some Key Facts

- **Kuoni Destination Management USA** is part of the Kuoni Group, which has set the travel industry's global standard since 1906.
- Kuoni offers destination management services in South Beach, Miami, Palm Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, Coral Gables, Ft. Meyers, Sanibel, Captiva and The Keys.
- Founded in 1997, **TeamAmerica** is a full service tour operator with offices in New York, Miami Beach and Los Angeles.
- Its Elite line specializes in luxury travel and caters to VIP clients.
- **Sawgrass Mills**, in Sunrise, Florida, a city in Broward County, is the seventh largest mall in the U.S., the largest single story mall in the U.S. and the second largest mall in Florida.
- Opened in 1990, Sawgrass Mills has more than 300 retail outlets and name brand discounters.
- Anchors tenants are Off 5th, and Super Target.



Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco

EXCITE YOUR TASTEBUDS

From street food to haute cuisine, and everything in-between, eating pleasure is not just limited to breakfast, lunch and dinner

Did you know a **cronut** – a cross between a croissant and a doughnut – was invented by French pastry chef Dominique Ansel in **New York City**?

And the Philadelphia cheesesteak sandwich of thinly sliced steak pieces, melted cheese on an Italian roll was invented at a hotdog stand?

Big U.S. cities with their large and diverse populations are home to any and every type of cuisine.

From the wallet-friendly to the wallet-busting, from typically American fare to foreign and exotic tastes, visitors will not get hungry and every visit can be filled with colorful and tasty experiences to be savored and shared on social media.

Foodies know **San Francisco** prides itself for the diversity of its product, especially its food and wine.

Its reputation for great dining has been reaffirmed with Michelin awarding two of its restaurants with its highest rating in its 2015 eating guide.

Benu and **Saison** in the city's SoMa district joined the **French Laundry** in Yountville and the **Restaurant at Meadowood** in Napa in the top three-star category for Exceptional Cuisine.

Michelin has awarded stars to a record 40 restaurants in San Francisco and the Bay Area.

Six San Francisco restaurants have been recognized by Michelin in its two-star Excellent Cuisine category with **Acquerello** joining the roster in its latest guide. The other two-star restaurants are **Atelier Crenn**, **Baume**, **Coi**, **Manresa** and **Quince**. The one-star restaurants in San Francisco

are **Ame**, **Aziza**, **Boulevard**, **Campton Place**, **Gary Danko**, **Keiko à Nob Hill**, **Kusakabe**, **La Folie**, **Luce**, **Maruya**, **Michael Mina**, **Sons & Daughters**, **SPQR**, **Spruce** and **State Bird Provisions**.

For bubbly lovers, the reservation-only champagne lounge of the **San Francisco Champagne Society**, which opened in August 2014, is the place to go to where grower producer champagnes are served.

The intimate 250-square foot loft holds a maximum of 20 guests.

In **Las Vegas**, visitors are spoiled for choice with its many famous restaurants and quality cafés to choose from 24/7.

At the iconic curved high-rise five-star **Wynn Las Vegas**, for example, dining options range from gourmet restaurants to relaxed cafés.

A good bet is to eat at **The Buffet**, **Terrace Pointe Cafe** or **Zoozacrackers Deli**. These eateries, and the **Drugstore Café** for a quick coffee, pastry or sandwich, will not break the bank.

The highest concentration of food trucks per capita is in Miami



Some Key Facts

- Standing in line and buying a meal from a food truck has become part and parcel of American culture with TV food programmes featuring the most famous and popular.
- These colorful and sometimes whimsically designed mobile kitchens attract long snaking queues once they establish a reputation and foodies chase them all over the city.
- Serving just about everything from sizzling pork tacos to gourmet gelato flavors, food trucks have become all the rage in U.S. cities.
- Today, there are more than 4,000 food trucks throughout the country, changing what it means to eat out in America.
- New York City, Boston and Chicago are not the food truck capitals.
- According to reports the highest concentration of food trucks per capita is in Orlando, followed by Miami and Washington, D.C.

If you want to splurge, **Encore Las Vegas**, exudes Vegas-style prestige housing elite restaurants **Sinatra** and **Botero**.

The former is an upscale Italian restaurant showcasing Frank Sinatra's Academy Award and other memorabilia.

On the other hand, **Botero**, features the work of Colombian artist Fernando Botero served alongside steak and seafood.



A treat for meat lovers



Times Square, New York City

SHOPPING

RETAIL THERAPY AT ITS BEST

The brands, the department stores, the outlet malls and the souvenirs give the shopaholic plenty to take home to enjoy



New York City

Many already shop online to buy the best of American and what they cannot find at home.

For those who love shopping, a shopping spree in the world-famous retail therapy capitals of Las Vegas, Los Angeles and New York City will help chase away the blues.

On the East Coast, **Midtown** in **New York City** is the core retail and commercial area where **Fifth Avenue** is the most exclusive retail neighborhood and home to huge brands like **Saks Fifth Avenue**, **Tiffany & Co**, **Cartier** and **Lord and Taylor**.

Other famous stores include **Bloomingdales**, **Macy's**, **Nordstrom** and **Neiman Marcus**.

Many stores in New York City offer steep discounts on Black Friday,

the day after Thanksgiving, which falls on the fourth Thursday in November.

January and February are also great shopping months with huge discounts offered throughout the city.

Las Vegas Premium Outlets have two very popular destinations for locals and tourists looking to save anywhere between 25% and 65% on designer clothes, leather shoes and accessories.

There are two locations of the outlets – **North** and **South**, and some say there is not much difference between the two.

However, the North location is more upscale, has 150 stores and is an outdoor mall.

The South location has 140 more affordable stores and is an indoor

mall. This is a good place to shop on a budget in Las Vegas.

Meanwhile, **LINQ**, the US\$550 million retail, dining, entertainment and hospitality district owned and operated by **Caesars Entertainment**, has become the new fashion landmark in the heart of the Las Vegas Strip and is very popular among Asian travellers.

Los Angeles is dotted with malls and shopping centres in areas popular with out-of-towners.

In **West LA and Beverly Hills**, there is Beverly Center Shopping Mall, Rodeo Drive, Two Rodeo, Century City Shopping Center and Westside Pavilion.

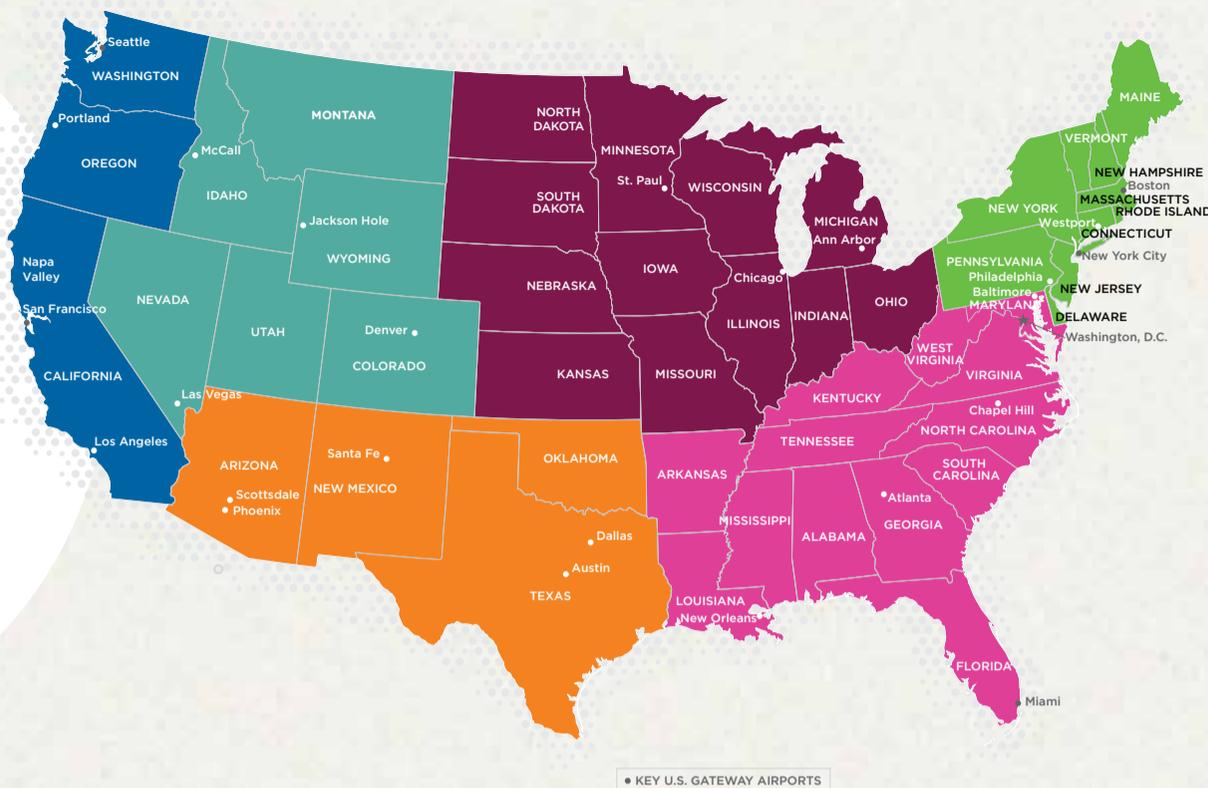
In **Hollywood**, there is Hollywood & Highland, Universal CityWalk, Melrose Avenue and Robertson Boulevard Shopping District in West Hollywood.

In **Downtown LA** there is California Market Center, LA Fashion District, LA Flower District, Little Tokyo District, Olvera Street and Citadel Factory Outlet.



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

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

What are the rules regarding large amounts of money?

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

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- Up to one liter of alcoholic beverages per individual 21 and older
- Gifts and purchases valued at a maximum of US\$100 in total



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