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Fairfax still hungry after Kuoni buy

Thomas Cook India's parent company intends to expand further into Asia by snapping up niche players

By Raini Hamdi

FAIRFAX Financial Holdings, which owns Thomas Cook India and is backed by billionaire Prem Watsa, is on the prowl for more acquisitions even when the ink is barely dry on its recent purchase of Kuoni Group's travel businesses in India and Hong Kong.

Thomas Cook India's managing director Madhavan Menon told *TTG Asia Daily* the company was looking at Asia "more actively", particularly at "niche" travel businesses which it could buy, such as its acquisition of Sri Lankan DMC Luxe Asia Travels last July.

The purchase of the Kuoni

businesses in India, comprising outbound travel brand SOTC and DMC Sita, and the Hong Kong tour operating, made through Thomas Cook India, along with Luxe Asia, was "a way to mitigate the risk for Thomas Cook", whose foreign exchange business was "exceptionally large", Menon said.

The company would also be losing the Thomas Cook brand name in 2025 as part of the agreement when it was acquired by Fairfax from the Thomas Cook Group UK in 2012.

"The value of SOTC, 59 years old, and Sita, 55 years old, are far

higher. More importantly, by acquiring them (we are acquiring) exceptional management teams, people such as Depak Deva (CEO, Destination Management India and South Asia of Kuoni Travel India) and Vishal Suri (CEO, SOTC).



Menon: mitigating the risk

"With the Hong Kong acquisition, we'll grow organically. Asia is where the action is going to be. China, Indonesia and India are primary travel source markets for the next few years, while South-east Asia is also going to be a stronger inbound market. So now, we will expand further

into Asia by looking at other opportunities. But while we will be a mass market player in India, we want to be niche in Asia."

Menon is eyeing "well-run" niche travel businesses which will be allowed independence post-purchase. "We don't have the ability to run them. It's never our policy to interfere. It's the same when we were acquired by Fairfax and it's exactly what we'll replicate," he said.

SOTC, Sita and Kuoni Hong Kong will remain independent, he said. The Kuoni name is licensed to Fairfax/Thomas Cook India for one year in India and five years in Hong Kong, but brands such as SOTC, Sita and

Distant Frontiers are transferred.

"For businesses that are retail and customer-facing, I don't want to tangle with the customer. Let them choose which (brand) they want to buy from."

Asked about the future of tour operating, since Kuoni wanted out, he said: "There's a future absolutely. Kuoni sold off for totally different reasons: it wants to concentrate on the B2B space and focus on its DMCs. I don't have a problem with that. I believe there is a future as a packaged tour provider, and when it comes to complex itineraries, you need the balance between bricks-and-mortar and digital. That's what we will provide."

Brand USA sees results, dives deeper into Asian market

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

BRAND USA will intensify its focus on emerging South-east Asian markets like Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand following its success in growing the brand in this region.

The US welcomed 9.6 million Asians last year, up six per cent from 2013. The main markets, in both size and growth, were China, India, Japan and South Korea. But markets such as Vietnam, though still



Garzilli: chasing emerging markets

small, are conspicuous by their stellar rises. There were 86,000 travellers to the US last year, a 34 per cent year-on-year increase. In particular, the number of Vietnamese travellers to New York shot up by 113 per cent to 32,000 last year, from 15,000 in 2013.

Makiko Matsuda Healy, senior vice president, global tourism development of NYC & Co, said: "One of the reasons could be that the economy in these emerging

South-east Asia markets is stabilising and there is a rising middle class population."

Tom Garzilli, senior vice president-global sponsorships for Brand USA, said in addition to Brand USA's current promotional efforts and educational seminars launched in countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, it would be "following the emerging economies closely".

Plans are also underway to extend the USA Discovery pro-

gramme to these countries, but no definite timeline was given.

Additionally, Brand USA will soon launch an online education and certification programme for the trade in South-east Asia, said Garzilli.

The growing Asian market is also whetting the appetite of more US exhibitors to learn more about the market. Garzilli said new US exhibitors at ITB Asia this year include the Philadelphia Convention & Visitor Bureau and the Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board.

OVERHEARD



AS we tipped Wednesday, Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts' new brand is (drumrolls) Dhawa. Yes, it's a tree – a small Indian gum tree. Aimed at a younger clientele, it will have Nest's (communal spaces), a Void lobby and a Nook all-day restaurant/bar. Far from limited service, it has a spa, fitness centre and kids club. The first, with 346 keys, will open in Bo'ao, China, in March 2016, then a 516-key Dhawa in Cuba in July 2016.

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News

M&A targets rise

Incumbents swoop in on startups to protect themselves or expand

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

EVEN as travel startups continue to pop up on the radar to radically transform the travel landscape, established incumbents are making moves on them in a bid to protect and expand their business.

To keep up with the rapid pace of innovation and competition from these budding entrepreneurs, the best way incumbents can emerge unscathed is through acquisitions.

Last year, TripAdvisor acquired Viator with the aim of breaking into the local events and activities market. This year, Expedia procured both Travelocity and Orbitz.

Meanwhile in Singapore, vacation rentals website HomeAway acquired Singapore-based online startup Travelmob in 2013 in a bid to push deeper into the Asia-Pacific market.

Dan Lynn, HomeAway's vice president of Asia-Pacific, told *TTG Asia Daily*: "Acquiring Travelmob helped accelerate our en-

try into Asian markets, where the vacation rental industry is much newer."

Travelmob has since been launched in 14 Asia-Pacific markets following the acquisition, said Lynn.

Explaining how "exhausted startups" can benefit from acquisitions, Jeff Hurst, HomeAway's chief strategy officer, said: "The strongest case for (entering an acquisition agreement) is when a company has exhausted its means for growth and can no longer scale effectively."



Anand: competitive startup scene

"By merging with a larger company and gaining new resources, many startups find new avenues for their business that would not have been available otherwise," he said.

Amit Anand, co-founder and managing director of Jungle Ventures, a global venture capital firm, said: "While travel is an easy industry to get into, it is hard to create a unique value proposition so it becomes easy for mergers

and acquisitions to take place."

Anand cited Airbnb as an example of an "oversaturated service" in the travel industry as there are too many versions – e.g. those that cater to bachelors or religious people – of it now. He also added that less than one-third of startups actually succeed amid the competitive market.

Winnie Tan, founder and CEO of TripZilla, an online travel portal established in Singapore, said: "I believe most startups want to build something big. That being the case, many of us would consider a merger or an acquisition if it would allow the company to grow quickly or expand into a new market."

"This is especially so for the online travel space, where there is cut-throat competition, and competitors might merge to prevent price wars and increase user base. But companies may also face problems when they integrate the business – in terms of the integration of teams, operations, vision, technology and culture," she elaborated.

BLOOMING GOOD TIME AT THE PARK

What a fantastic evening we had at Park Hotel Alexandra on Wednesday evening, but with these charming and perfect hosts, led by general manager Angeline Tan (in grey suit), it is little wonder the late-night function was lovely. Even the haze stayed away, while the lush views of the greens from the poolside were a welcomed relief after a full day inside the halls of ITB Asia.



Slower economies fail to weaken longhaul demand

By Samuel Ng

DESPITE slower economic growth and depreciating currencies in South-east Asia, longhaul travel is on the rise, according to several buyers from Malaysia and the Philippines interviewed.

Forever Travel Service Malaysia is seeing sales to longhaul destinations increasing "by 10 to 15 per cent", according to its commercial executive, Keny Goh.

One reason he cited was the rising affluence of travellers from Malaysia, who were looking to travel more frequently and farther from Asia.

Eric Lim, IT creative web support at Holiday Tours Malaysia concurred, saying that longhaul travel had been on the rise despite the weakened ringgit.

He said: "There's still a strong market for longhaul travel, es-

pecially for those who have the spending power."

Similarly in the Philippines, more travellers are looking towards longhaul destinations, commented Jesus Cabalu, HelmsBriscoe's manager of Philippines. He elaborated: "Corporate travellers are starting to realise that they get more value because of the economic situation (in countries such as Greece and Turkey)."

Siony Cariquitan, president of Light Miles Travel, which specialises in corporate travel out of the Philippines, said her company also recorded a rising interest in European cities.

"In the past year alone, we have had an increase of 800 to 1,000 customers looking for longhaul travel mainly to places like Paris and Milan," she said.



Cabalu: more value in Greece, Turkey

A luxe rebirth called The Nai Harn

By Dannon Har

THE former Royal Phuket Yacht Club will be reborn as The Nai Harn on December 28 after an 18-month refurbishment.

Named eponymously after the beach in Phuket on which it resides, it will be part of Leading Hotels of the World and eyes a rate from 10,000 baht (US\$281) in the soft-launch phase.

Part of Manathai Hotels & Resorts, the 130-room property is the only one along the beach located on the southernmost tip of Phuket. Frank Grassmann, its general manager, said: "Manathai is a 4.5 star, scratching on five star, while The Nai Harn is a five-star-plus product; it deserves to be (a standalone) with a new name, which was chosen to showcase its location."

All rooms feature 40m² balconies with day beds and sea-views, while amenities include a rooftop terrace, swimming pool, proprietary spa, gym, two F&B outlets and two meeting spaces which can accommodate up to about 100 pax in total.

Rooms are contemporary in design but include southern Thai touches such as shadow puppets as tapestry on walls.

Grassmann, who is looking predominantly at the leisure segment to fill the rooms, said: "MICE is also important for us. We are looking at smaller meetings from the Asia-Pacific region." The hotel is over an hour's drive from Phuket International Airport but for the rich, there's a 15-minute helicopter flight or a two-hour yacht sailing.

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News

Garuda launches passes

Trade welcomes the initiative but urges more communications and cooperation

By Mimi Hudoyo

GARUDA Indonesia has launched a Visit Wonderful Indonesia Pass, offering heavily-discounted rates on theme holidays within Indonesia.

The programme, which can contain between three and five flight segments, include the Explore Indonesia Pass, Underwater Pass, Heritage Pass and Adventure Pass.

Dony Widodo, Garuda Indonesia vice president greater Jakarta region, said: "Working together with our sister company, Garuda Indonesia Holidays, we have created options for travellers, for example, Denpasar-Lombok-Labuan Bajo for the Underwater Pass; the heritage sites of Jogjakarta, Semarang, Surabaya, Bandung, Padang and Makassar; and adventurous places like Lombok, Labuan Bajo, Surabaya and Medan."

The packages are available for inbound tourists only and must be combined with return international tickets on Garuda.

They are primarily targeted at the Singapore, Malaysia, China, Japan and Australia markets.

Widodo said: "This is in line with

the Ministry of Tourism's target markets for the year."

A Jakarta-Denpasar-Labuan Bajo-Denpasar-Jakarta would cost US\$660, but only US\$276 with the pass, he said. Combining Jakarta-Denpasar-Surabaya-Semarang-Jakarta flight segments would cost US\$531, but with the pass would only cost US\$231, he said.

Asian travel agency chiefs welcome the pass. Lesley Tan, business development manager of MISA Travel, said: "Singaporeans are usually looking for new destinations and products, such as heritage and adventure, so the programme has the potential to work if it is well promoted." Garuda needed to get the message across to the public to create demand, she said.

Buyers and Indonesian suppliers interviewed appreciated the airline's initiative but regretted the lack of communications and industry engagement on it. Most have not heard of the pass.

Herdy Sayoga, board member of the Badung Regency (Bali) Tourism Promotion Board, said: "It is a good idea for the airline to come up with such a product, but why didn't it involve us? We do not even know about it. Together,

we can come up with packages and promote the product together."

Stevan Servin, chairman of Lombok Hotel Association, said the airline should first have a consistent presence in the market and, second, good communications and cooperation with the industry.

"Garuda (last year) had five flights between Bali and Lombok with high 80s load factor but this has become two flights a day today.

"It reduced the capacity of Makassar-Lombok flights by changing the aircraft from Bombardier 100 to ATR 72 without any explanation. How can we promote (the destination) if they keep changing their schedule and capacity? If hotels are doing promotions on Makassar, for example, their (efforts) would be useless if seats are suddenly not available."

Aileen Collins, personal travel manager Asia Travel Expert for TravelManagers Australia, said Australian travellers would not pick up such offers without an understanding of what the destinations had to offer. She urged Indonesia to increase Aussie travellers' awareness of the destinations first.

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EDITORIAL

Karen Yue Group Editor
Xinyi Liang-Pholsena Assistant Editor, TTG Asia
Dannon Har Assistant Editor, TTG Asia Online
Paige Lee Pei Qi Assistant Editor
Rachel AJ Lee Sub Editor
S Puvaneswary Editor, Malaysia/Brunei
Mimi Hudoyo Editor, Indonesia
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Redmond Sia, Goh Meng Yong Creative Designers
Samuel Ng Editorial Intern
Lina Tan Editorial Assistant

CONTRIBUTORS

Prudence Lui, Rohit Kaul, Greg Lowe, Rosa Ocampo, Feizal Samath, Caroline Boey, Michael Mackey, Julian Ryall, Rebecca Elliott

SALES & MARKETING

Michael Chow Group Publisher
Shirley Tan Senior Business Manager
Jonathan Yap Senior Business Manager
Ingrid Chung Business Manager
Cheryl Lim Advertisement Administration Manager
Cheryl Tan Corporate Marketing Manager
Stephanie Toh Senior Marketing Executive

PUBLISHING SERVICES

Tony Yeo Division Manager
Kristy Lim Publishing Services Executive
Lynn Lim Web Executive
Katherine Leong Circulation Executive

TTG ASIA MEDIA

Darren Ng Managing Director
Raini Hamdi Senior Editor

Egypt's tourism seeks new dawn in post-Arab Spring recovery

By S Puvaneswary

IN A bid to restore traveller confidence and put Egypt back on the tourist map, Egyptian minister of tourism Hesham Zaazou will launch a three-year global campaign at the World Travel Market in London next month.

Targeted at both the consumer and travel trade, the campaign will focus on traveller safety as well as new products and attractions in Egypt, marking the first of its kind since the Arab Spring in 2011. The intense media reports of social unrest in the wake of the Egyptian Revolution had greatly dampened travel interest to the country and deterred travel agencies from selling the destination.

Egyptian Tourism Authority undersec-

retary head of the domestic tourism sector, Mahmoud Abd El Wahab, said: "Through the campaign, we want to attract 20 per cent more tourist arrivals, up from this year's targeted 11 million tourists."



Mahmoud: new global campaign

Last year, tourist arrivals to Egypt totalled only 10 million, a vast contrast from 15 million in 2010. Egypt's main visitor source markets are Europe, Asia and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

According to Mahmoud, the campaign will also encompass fam trips for tour operators and journalists, as well as sharing advertising costs with overseas operators. For instance, the NTO will spotlight classical tours for the Asian market, whereas emphasis will be placed on Cairo and South Sinai for the GCC market.

Dorsett goes after the LGBT market

DORSETT Hospitality International wants a share of the growing LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) pie.

Its senior vice president sales & marketing, Philip Schaez, estimated the market to be worth US\$200 billion. Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore, Bali and Tokyo are the top destinations in Asia for these travellers.

"We have hotels in many of those cities, giving us a competitive advantage to grab the market," he said.

Dorsett is participating at tradeshows such as ITB Asia, World Travel Market and ITB Berlin to meet tour operators handling the market. It is also on the way to becoming a member of the International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association.

"Becoming a member gives us the endorsement that we are LGBT-friendly," he said.

Internally, the hotel group is constantly training its people to host the market.

"We are (a company) which has no fears of communicating with any guest, regardless of their geographical, religious or sexual orientation," said Schaez.

He added: "Fear only exists when you don't know about it. That is why at Dorsett we have a mission to be loud about LGBT and educate people about what LGBT is all about.

"There is nothing to fear and it is something that you should welcome with open arms. That is again the nature of hospitality." – **Mimi Hudoyo**



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News

The many faces of terrorism's impact

No one size fits all in assessing fallout, management post-crisis

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

WITH THE threat of terrorism looming larger than ever, the industry is being urged to understand that every impact is an interplay of factors and that no one size fits all in navigating the challenges that follow.

For example, the recent Bangkok Erawan Shrine bombing had a short-lived effect on tourism, according to booking data shared by speakers at TTG Asia Media Engagement Workshop on Wednesday.

This, however, was a marked contrast to the shootings in Tunisia in June.

"The initial week post-bomb showed fluctuations for travel to Bangkok before stabilising," said Stewart Hunter, director, sales & partnerships, Asia-Pacific at Sojern. "There was no noticeable year-on-year decline for

global demand for Thailand, and Thailand was the eighth highest country globally for travel intent in Q3."

Bangkok also saw a rapid recovery in the business travel segment in the bombing aftermath.

Todd Arthur, managing director Asia-Pacific, HRS, said: "We saw less than one per cent decrease in business bookings in the first week and 100 per cent of the bookings recovered by the second week."

Tunisia, on the other hand, saw a 28 per cent week-on-week dip in travel intent, and the picture remains one of year-on-year decline due to traveller's view of a lack of security.

The marked differences in responses boil down to several factors, they pointed out. A destination facing a one-off terrorist attack is likely to have less

lingering repercussions than one consistently associated with terrorism; and likewise for a tourist destination that draws its visitor source from both business and leisure sectors than a destination that is highly reliant on just leisure traffic.

While a return to business-as-usual situation following a terrorist attack generally spells good news for travel stakeholders, Arthur cautioned against crisis fatigue or complacency on the part of travel managers.

"There's a lot of danger in becoming numb to crises. (Corporations) have to take responsibility for travellers' security and safety. They need to be aware of the challenges and risks that exist in the marketplace," said Arthur, who further underscored the importance of corporates investing in new mobile technology and developing a good travel management plan in exercising their duty of care for their employees.



Arthur: invest in safety



Law: weaker yen, stronger yearning

Japan's now sizzling hot

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

THE SHARP drop in the Japanese yen coupled with fading Fukushima fears are now compelling foreign travellers to visit the country in droves, according to buyers that TTG Asia Daily spoke to.

According to the latest statistics from Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), the number of international visitors to Japan from January to September this year reached approximately 14.5 million, posting an astounding 48.8 per cent increase from the same period last year.

For a country once perceived as a pricey destination, it is now 25 per cent cheaper than last year to travel there, said Maria Law, account manager of TLX Travel Hong Kong, who witnessed a 20 per cent increase in bookings to Tokyo and Osaka.

Hailing Japan her fastest-growing market this year, Law added: "Japan is a favourite shopping paradise, and this big difference in prices now makes it very attractive."

"Besides the very attractive yen, the earlier issue of the radiation fears is no longer a con-

cern now," added Michael Chow, director-corporate development and staff incentives, Provident Capital Group Hong Kong. The company saw a 35 per cent year-on-year hike in traffic to Japan, and has more than 200 confirmed groups heading to the country this month.

Gerald Fitzpatrick, director of Five Continents in the UK, agreed: "There is probably a pent-up demand for Japan from the earlier years and now that (the radiation issue) is no longer a big concern, the numbers are growing very fast into Japan."

"They now see that it is the best time to return (to Japan) since it is also cheaper," he added.

Applauding JNTO for its strong promotion efforts in overseas markets, Eckard Kremer, owner of Pacific Leisure Group Thailand, said: "We see a lot of advertising done (by JNTO) to promote Japanese food."

"Their advertising has been very powerful because when I step into shopping malls (in Thailand), there is no way we can miss the beautiful picture of Japan."

Nepal stages comeback

By S Puvaneswary

EAGER to show the world that Nepal is ready to welcome visitors again, the Tourism Recovery Committee is leading consumer and MICE marketing efforts in the key markets of India, China, Japan, the UK and Europe, armed with a marketing budget of US\$600 million.

The committee, which was formed on May 7 in the wake of Nepal's devastating earthquake, is headed by the Department of Tourism's director general Tulsi Prasad Gautam and comprises members from the government, industry associations and the private sector.

As well, Nepal Tourism Board and other Nepalese exhibitors will attend the World Travel Market in London next month to signal to foreign outbound agencies that the destination is back in business, said Marcus Cotton, managing director of Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge.

Even though business in the current peak travel season (October/November) is down by 50 per cent, Cotton is confident that Nepal's tourism industry will bounce back and expects to see positive growth in two or three years.

He explained: "We lost some ground when local tour operators moved resources away from their main areas of expertise and went into the relief business."

The temples in Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, which are still being rebuilt, can also be marketed as "attractions" for tourists to view the reconstruction efforts currently taking place, said Cotton.

Meanwhile, the Seattle-based Adventure Travel Trade Association will organise a media fam trip for 20 media members from the UK, Canada and China from October 30 to November 1, the association's president, Shannon Stowell, told TTG Asia Daily.

The group will visit Kathmandu and the surrounding areas to experience the destination and see the recovery progress firsthand.



SAYING ABRACADABRA TO SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Just as how Wyndham Hotel Group has enlisted *Games of Thrones* actor Kristofer Hivju as the face of its new wizard-themed loyalty programme, (from left) Ha Long Star Service & Tourist's Nguyen Ba Tien, Southern Star Hotel Thailand's Ninda Olanvoravuth, C.A.S. Asset Phuket's Tanakrit Dararattanaroj and Toyota Andaman Thailand's Itthi Limsathayurat are now enlisting the New Jersey-based hospitality group to work its management magic on the upcoming properties that they will soon be owners to.

Wyndham Hotel Group has announced at ITB Asia seven new signings in South-east Asia, including Days Inn Rest Sea Jomtien Beach Pattaya, Days Inn Siam Central Pattaya, Days Inn Patong Beach Phuket and Ramada Suites Wong Amat Pattaya, Ramada ChaoFa Phuket, Wyndham Legend Halong and Ramada Resort Lumut.



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News

Qatar in luxury push

Upcoming high-end hotel brands and museums are the catalyst

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

WITH an influx of prestigious hotel brands and a high-profile museum coming online in the next few years, Qatar is now positioning itself as a destination for luxury travellers.

Major hospitality brands in the pipeline include The Waldorf Astoria, Mandarin Oriental, MGallery, Le Meridien and JW Marriott.

According to Jennifer Beggs, head of tourism marketing and promotion at Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA), the destination's supply currently stands at around 19,000 rooms, with 70 per cent belonging to the four- and five-star categories.

The National Museum of Qatar, an iconic architectural masterpiece designed by Jean Nouvel, is due to be completed next year. When opened, it will join Qatar's growing collection of museums, the Museum of Islamic Art and the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art.

The Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre, which opened earlier this year, had helped boost the destination's MICE appeal, added Beggs.

She said: "Qatar is looking for the high-end and discerning traveller who knows how to appreciate authentic history and culture."

To court the Asian market which has grown by 107 per cent since 2009, Beggs said a newly launched educational programme targeting travel consultants in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong was a key initiative.

She said: "We know the importance of educating the trade on what our destination can offer. We

are even planning two major fam trips so they can see (Qatar) for themselves."

QTA's latest statistics show that 40 per cent of visitors last year came from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, 28 per cent from Asia and Oceania, and 15 per cent from Europe.

QTA targets to increase tourist arrivals to seven million by 2030, up from the three million expected this year.

Qatar is looking for the high-end and discerning traveller who knows how to appreciate history and culture.



Jennifer Beggs
Head of tourism marketing and promotion
Qatar Tourism Authority

Lofty Asian goals for small Luxembourg

By Dannon Har

LUXEMBOURG may be a tiny nation in Europe but its tourism ambition is anything but puny, as its tourism officials embark on a charm offensive to lure long-haul travellers from Asia.

Asia's immense growth potential makes it a prime target for Luxembourg, so much so that the Ministry of Economy will be going on a week-long trade mission to Chinese cities including Shanghai and Beijing come April 2016.

Stepping up awareness of the destination among Asian tourists is now crucial for the NTO, Gilles Scholtus, government counsellor of SMEs and entrepreneurship at Luxembourg's Ministry of Economy, told *TTG Asia Daily*.

He elaborated that the first step is to spread the word so that travellers know that the destination exists, while the second step is to ensure that the media and tour operators are educated on the country's offerings.

"Once these steps are taken, I'm sure we will attract more Asian tourists," he said.

Scholtus added: "FITs are our target, because we don't have hundreds of hotels with hundreds of rooms.

"We target FITs because they suit us and we have lots to offer them."

Ricky Wohl, government counsellor of tourism at Luxembourg's Ministry of Economy, revealed that most Asian leisure visitors to Luxembourg are between 35 to 45 years old and typically come as part of tour groups from China, Japan and South Korea.

"We currently have more of the educated, sophisticated traveller who visit (Luxembourg) to learn something, and to eat and sleep well," said Wohl.

Corporates and MICE visitors make up 43 per cent and 40 per cent respectively of the country's total arrivals, while leisure tourists account for only 17 per cent.

JTB competes for more Asian incentives

By Dannon Har

JTB Corp has embarked on a massive growth plan to expand its global footprint, with a particular focus on growing the Asian outbound incentive market to Japan, Europe and America.

To that end, it is growing organically by opening local sales offices and branches, as well as acquiring established operators the likes of European

DMC Tumlare and Singapore-based Tour East. And with the Americas-focused TPI recently launched and a South American partnership coming up in 2016, Africa will be the only continent unreached by JTB.

"JTB receives a lot of business from all over the world. We are now (delivering our) *Departing Globally, Arriving Globally* slogan," said Toshihide Ozaki, senior manager, global inbound

business at JTB.

While leisure travellers are within its business scope, it is the MICE segment that the global DMC has its sights on.

"The leisure segment is often a severe price competition, whereas MICE customers require local intelligence and planning. We can offer that with our vast network," said Ozaki, who added that largest growth was recorded in the Asian outbound

market to Europe, Hawaii and the US' West Coast.

Surprisingly, Vietnam has also emerged as a lucrative market, joining the ranks of China and Malaysia as the top three source markets for travellers to the US, said Howard Wang, manager, sales & operation at TPI.


Still, there are challenges ahead, as corporates are allocating smaller budgets for their incentive trips.

"Budgets are tight compared to last year. For instance, they are choosing to stay at four-star rather than five-star hotels this year," explained Wang.



Ozaki: global proposition


Julia Lai, assistant general manager at Tumlare, added that there had been a 20 per cent price increase – following the currency crisis – for most Asian travellers to Europe, resulting in a proportionate constraint in their incentive budgets.



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MICE feature



How useful is that loyalty programme?

Many hotel loyalty programmes today seek to reward both the company and event planner, with perks that can be used for the latter's own pleasure. But will such incentives tempt the planner to put his own interest first, or worse, keep all the points for himself?

Greg Lowe and Caroline Boey find out what's being done to keep abuse at bay

Loyalty schemes have long been a key revenue driver for hotels, with such programmes contributing more than half the occupancy for some global brands.

Traditionally, hotels used the initiatives to reward corporate clients and meetings planners while managing slower moving inventory and underutilised events spaces. More recently, they have become increasingly dynamic and sophisticated as brands realise they must offer more to earn the loyalty of members in an intensely competitive marketplace.

One major development in this field was Starwood's launch of SPG Pro last year. The programme essentially combines a planner's individual SPG (Starwood Preferred Guest) account with the corporate account that they manage.

Membership was also extended for the first time beyond meeting planners to include accredited travel agents who can also earn elite status with SPG, thus creating a unique proposal in the market, said Alison Taylor, senior vice president Starwood Sales Organisation, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide.

"With SPG Pro, we simply make it easier for our members to combine all different Starpoint earnings into a consolidated SPG account as opposed to having separate membership accounts in the past," she said. "Members can transform their Starpoints into the redemption experi-

ence of their dreams – the choice and flexibility is all up to them."

The new programme enables Starwood to focus on building longer-term relationships with members, with the icing on the cake being the ability of a member to keep all accrued points when they change jobs, subject to the terms and conditions of their employment.

Marriott Rewards Rewarding Events enables planners to earn points and miles for holding meetings, conferences and other events at participating properties, as well as enjoy personal benefits.

"Event planners who are also Marriott Rewards members can take advantage of any exclusive member offers that are promoted throughout the year for qualifying stays and earn bonus points through special offers from Rewarding Events. They can also redeem points for future meeting credits," said Peggy Fang Roe, chief sales and marketing officer at Marriott International Asia-Pacific.

Le Club Accorhotels (LCAH) Meeting Planner offers a similar range of benefits, as well as the redemption of points for cash vouchers and special perks for elite members, such as VIP access to concerts. The hotel group has also recently improved the appeal of its loyalty programme.

According to Ianic Menard, vice president of sales, marketing and distribution for Accor Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines, plan-

ners have been able to use their vouchers to pay for up to 15 per cent of a future event since March. "(We now also offer) a double-dipping model, giving points both to event participants staying at the hotel and the meeting planner. The latter points can also be split between two meeting planners," Menard explained.

Are the programmes abuse-proof?

The business case for such schemes, and the renewed incentives for individual planners is sound. In the case of Starwood, B2B business accounts for almost 70 per cent of total room revenue, with each additional percentage point adding US\$80 million to the company's top line.

Loyalty clearly pays dividends. The question is whether ramping up incentives for individuals could result in situations where members put their own interests first, instead of finding the best deal for their company. Or, in the worst case, simply keep all the points for their own use.

Starwood, as do the other hotel companies speaking with the *Daily*, insists there is nothing new about having individual accounts with corporate membership.

"Our B2B loyalty programme has always been for individuals," said Taylor. "We take security very seriously and have the necessary safeguards to ensure good controls are in place."

Accor, which also awards points earned under its LCAH Meeting Planner to indi-

viduals, has sufficient measures in place to prevent abuse.

"When registering for the LCAH Meeting Planner programme, organisers must complete a form: first, acknowledging they have the legal authorisation to participate in the programme with respect to their company's rules; and second, declaring they have informed their employer about their participation in the programme, particularly the attribution of personal advantages associated with LCAH," said Menard.

Likewise, Marriott's loyalty programme has terms and conditions that clearly state that membership accounts are personal to the member. "With regards to earning points through company activities for personal rewards, this is an agreement to be made between the member and his/her employing company," remarked Fang Roe. "Since we do not offer corporate accounts, there should not be instances of fraudulent activity whereby the individual benefits from the company's account."

But does the trade believe enough is being done to protect corporates?

Jeannie Techasiriwan, special events assistant director at Amway (Thailand), comments that it is the businesses themselves that must determine how points earned on a corporate account can be used.

She opined that planners and the companies they represent tend to be more focused on how they can use the various loyalty schemes to reduce event costs. "People have a lot on their plates, once they see other planners using the (loyalty programme), they take an interest in it... We use Lufthansa Partnership Benefit Plus, SPG Pro and Fairmont," Techasiriwan added.

However, a senior manager with a global business travel management company said any hotel groups offering individual planners such benefits has a duty to safeguard against abuse and educate clients, especially smaller companies, about any potential pitfalls in their loyalty programmes.

"The bottom line for hotels is to maximise venue occupancy and generate revenue," he said. "In a fiercely competitive market like Thailand this could result in problems (where individuals use company points for their personal benefit)."

Limitations as protection

For some companies, prevention is better than cure and they have set policies that prohibit their travel managers and event planners from utilising loyalty points gained from corporate spending.

Victor Lim, Shanghai-based regional meeting and travel manager of Ikea, told the *Daily*: "My company policy does not allow employees to personally benefit from any air or hotel loyalty programmes."

Some companies have also expressed a preference for immediate direct benefits to the event over a point system that allows for redemption later on.

A travel manager in the finance sector said his company's policy dictates that a company account be set up, and only best rates instead of points are allowed.

The assistant head of a travel management agency revealed that companies also value inclusions such as Wi-Fi and breakfast-on-the-go for its travellers.

A corporate travel manager with an IT firm said the sector tends to be strict with its travel policies and managing any loyalty programme would mean more work for the back-room audit department.

"Loyalty programmes never come into our RFPs. What is more important is last room availability, best rates and amenities," she explained.

MICE feature

Making space for innovation

New convention centres across Asia-Pacific show they are greener, smarter and are designed to cater to any event. The *Daily* looks at how new convention centres are innovating the space

International Convention Centre Sydney

The A\$1.1 billion (US\$867 million) International Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney), due to open in December 2016, is the centrepiece of the New South Wales government's A\$3 billion transformation of Darling Harbour.

A highlight of ICC Sydney is its flexibility, allowing three separated, self-sufficient, concurrent events across a tiered 2,500-seat theatre, tiered 1,000-seat theatre and flat-floor, 800-seat theatre.

ICC Sydney CEO, Geoff Donaghy, said: "The ability to separate and quarantine events means we can run three self-sufficient conventions, each with their own pre-function area, kitchen for bespoke catering and meeting rooms for breakouts or preparation areas."

"The flexibility theme continues to the open-air realm with a 5,000m² event deck and integration with Tumbalong Park, which is being reconfigured to hold events of up to 27,000 people."

ICC Sydney will also boast high-band-



width technology, venue-wide wireless connectivity, GPS way finding and interactive HD digital signage facilities.

The centre will welcome Australia's largest ballroom, which can host 2,000 pax for banquets and 3,500 pax for cocktails, with spectacular water and city views.

The exhibition halls in ICC Sydney stretch over two floors to provide an impressive total of 32,600m² of space, making it Australia's largest exhibition space.

Another key highlight in ICC Syd-

ney is a red carpet theatre which has a seating capacity of 8,000 suitable for major convention plenary sessions and international entertainment acts, and is scalable for plenaries of 6,000, 5,000 and 3,500 pax.

Donaghy said: "This theatre features an innovative fan-shaped layout purposefully created to bring audiences closer to performers and hosts, and provide unobstructed views of the stage." – **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre

When completed and fully open in 2017, the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre in Muscat will offer, besides 22,000m² in pillarless exhibition space, an all-rounded convention experience.

It is one of two major convention centres that AEG Ogden will open in the next two years, the other being ICC Sydney. Geoff Donaghy, AEG Ogden's group director convention and exhibition centres, said expectations for both centres are high.

Donaghy pointed out the many similarities between the two projects: "Both represent the future of convention centres; both are fully integrated in that they have a hotel and retail space as well. Oman is unique because we are building a whole new destination within the country."

The Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre will include three- to five-star hotels and a serviced residence, featuring 1,000 hotel rooms, and a conveniently located shopping centre.

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MICE feature



Left: Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre; Marriott Grand Ballroom in Manila

in the Gulf region for its aim to achieve the US Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Excellence in Design Certification, like ICC Sydney.

In terms of design, AEG Ogden wanted “something memorable”. Donaghy said: “We want the centre to be a showcase for Oman, and be a unique facility. But at the same time, it needs to clearly be part of the local environment and culture.”

Surrounded by parkland and overlooking a wadi, the centre is only a 10 minutes’ drive from the new Muscat International Airport. – **Natasha Dragun**

Indonesia Convention and Exhibition

The largest convention and exhibition centre in the country, Indonesia Convention and Exhibition (ICE) in Jakarta was designed to be flexible, functional and facilitate free-flowing traffic to accommodate all types of MICE events.

Launched in June this year, the centre is owned by Indonesia International Expo and Deutsche Messe.

The convention hall is divisible into four while the exhibition hall can be further split into 10 halls of 4,860m² each, enabling organisers to create independent events of various sizes.

Other features that make hall access easy include pre-function lobbies that can

be reached through four drop-off zones throughout the front of the venue, and VVIP drop-off and parking zones.

Designed by Cox Australia, ICE has green features built into it for more sustainable events, including a well-shaded glazed façade, aerated concrete block with insulated walls and LED lightbulb energy-saving systems. The roof of each hall has an elevated top surrounded by glass, allowing natural lighting and saving energy in the halls during set-up and dismantling.

The venue also boasts a fully equipped in-house catering service with a 2,000m² kitchen area, two large exhibition snack bars with 216 seats each, a 152-pax bistro located on the mezzanine level and a total of five pantries, one for every two halls.

Each of the 10 exhibition halls has rigging points every nine metres, with a hanging load of maximum two tons, adjacent to smaller rigging points positioned every 4.5m and able to hold a load of 100kg. Floor load capacity is two tons/m², and halls are equipped with utility trenches to enable secure and quick access to electricity, compressed air and water supply, the first of its kind in Indonesia.

Each hall also has Internet access, telecommunication services, roofs up to 26m at the highest point and individual air-conditioning systems.

ICE has three VIP lounges and multiple praying rooms to accommodate to

the needs of visitors. The centre’s existing 3,000-lot parking space will be doubled with the construction of another parking building and additional outdoor parking zones in future. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

Setia City Convention Centre

Setia City Convention Centre in Shah Alam, Selangor, is the first convention facility in Malaysia to be certified by the Green Building Index.

Francis Teo, head of Setia City Convention Centre, said that the centre’s green features have helped it secure business from international and regional companies that place emphasis on having meetings in a venue with sustainable practices.

Setia City Convention Centre works actively to reduce waste generated at meetings. The facility has installed an energy management system to track electricity and water consumption and to minimise leakages and wastage, while auto light sensors control lighting in public areas.

The size of writing pads and the length of pencils were also reduced after it was found that meeting delegates tend to waste stationery provided. Half of the centre’s landscaping needs are met through rain harvesting.

Glass walls were incorporated into the design as much as possible to allow natu-

ral light in and for guests to look out to panoramic views of the township as well as the centre’s 14,000m² manicured lawns.

Teo added: “Every room in the convention centre has air-conditioning that can be individually controlled according to the needs of the guests. Air-conditioning in public areas is kept between 22-24°C.”

The centre is also designed to be inclusive – wheelchair-friendly connections from the car park to the ground floor, a covered walkway between the centre to Setia City Mall and reserved parking bays for the disabled.

Setia City Convention Centre has also dedicated 20 of its 3,700 parking bays to electric cars with free use of charging points. “We are prepared to meet the needs of the future, when we will see more electric cars on the road,” said Teo.

The centre has high-speed broadband for video streaming. The ballroom is furnished with LED chandeliers which can change colours. According to Teo, a favourite among organisers is to choose lighting ambience to match the company’s corporate colours.

The ballroom also has built-in projectors on all four walls to provide guests good views of the projections, wherever they are seated. – **S Puvaneswary**

ska Co Ex

As regional economies take off throughout Indonesia, second-tier cities are stepping up for a piece of the MICE pie. One such city is Pekanbaru, the capital of Riau province, where there is an abundance of fuel and oil companies.

Emmanuel Guillard, Swiss-Belhotel International senior vice president, operations and development for Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam, said: “There is actually a big demand for meeting and exhibition space in relation to these businesses, and Pekanbaru has been losing the business to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Jakarta.”

It is this need that ska Co Ex, developed by Citra Citi Pacific and Grand Citra Prima, and managed by Swiss-Belhotel International, aims to fill.

Said Guillard: “The convention centre



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was built to accommodate the needs of the destination (from) today up to five years ahead. We do not try to compete head-on with mature destinations like Jakarta or Bali.”

Instead, ska Co Ex aims to attract medium-sized conferences and exhibitions from Asia and western Indonesia.

The convention centre’s ballroom is double the size of the largest existing venue in Pekanbaru, and can house congresses, events such as weddings and in-room concerts, and medium-sized exhibitions.

With a ceiling of 12m, the ballroom is flexible and comes with breakout rooms for smaller meetings. There are six elevators, two of which are dedicated for VIPs.

A giant portable screen, soundproof room partitions and other audiovisual equipment are also available. While considered basic standards for convention centres in major destinations, these are above expectation for venues in secondary cities. Broadband Internet connection is also available throughout the centre. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

Marriott Grand Ballroom

With 8,000m² of dedicated meeting space for over 5,000 pax, the new Marriott Grand Ballroom (MGB) can pass for a convention centre but shuns being called such. Bruce Winton, general manager, Marriott Hotel Manila, explained: “The venue itself is the size of a convention centre but in a five-star luxury hotel environment.”

Including an existing 1,974m² MICE space at Marriott Manila Hotel, MGB will offer close to 10,000m² of indoor and outdoor space, making it Marriott International’s biggest meeting and convention venue outside the US.

The venue comes with a 3,000m² column-free grand ballroom with a 12m ceiling, compared to the average eight metres. Multiple catwalks hidden on the ceiling offers a professional platform for light, sound and technical sets. Six multi-function VIP Skyboxes also offer a different view of the entire ballroom.

Using the Sky Fold technology partition, the grand ballroom can be subdivided completely and partitions can be retracted into a ceiling cavity with a simple turnkey operation.

Besides MGB, the West Wing currently under construction will be launched in end-2016 with 228 suites, adding to the existing 342 rooms at Marriott Hotel Manila.

At the same time, MGB’s Meeting Services App will allow planners to manage an event without leaving the meeting room, with real-time requests for coffee refills, room temperature changes or more chairs a click away.

Owned by Travellers International (TI), MGB is located across Terminal 3 of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, within the Resorts World Manila complex where TI is also planning to build Sheraton and Hilton hotels over the next few years. – **Rosa Ocampo**

National Exhibition and Convention Center

Billed as the world’s largest single building with 1.5 million m² of space, the National Exhibition and Convention Center, Shanghai (NECC) sets itself apart for its ability to cater to exhibitions featuring heavy industrial products.

Launched in June 2015, the shamrock-shaped complex comprises four buildings and a central commercial centre, and also three office buildings and a five-star hotel, all linked via an eight-metre high pedestrian walkway.

NECC’s four large and one small exhibition halls in the North Building have been built for heavy-duty use with ground load capacity of five tons/m². One of the large halls has a double-decker structure and the other four halls offer a single-floor and 32m-high column-free space.

The South Building houses four large double-decker halls, each with a ground load capacity of 3.5 tons/m² and ceilings 11m high, while the second floor has five

large halls and two smaller ones, each with a ground load capacity of 1.5 tons/m², and 16m high.

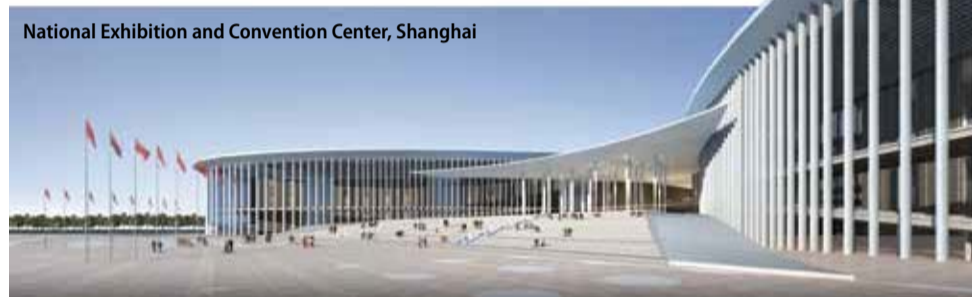
Meeting planners have more than 60 meeting rooms to choose from at NECC, from small rooms between 100-200m² to medium-sized rooms from 300-500m².

There is a large 1,000m² banquet hall and a grand 10,000m² multi-function hall with moveable partitions called West Hall, which can accommodate up to 3,000 pax.

The 100,000m² North Square event space outside the gate of the North Hall is suitable for open-air concerts, outdoor sports events, etc. Another open-air stage is Central Square, encircled by Commercial Plaza, which can take more than 2,000 pax for large commercial launch parties, square performances and brand promotion events.

NECC was jointly built by the Ministry of Commerce of China and the Shanghai Municipal Government, and is operated by Shanghai Exhibition, which is also an investor.

– **Caroline Boey**



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Destination Australia

Eye-popping Melbourne

The flourishing pop-up trend is key to attracting visitors to this cosmopolitan Australian city, writes [Rebecca Elliott](#)



St Jerome's – The Hotel, perched above Melbourne Central with views of the city skyline

In May, Melbourne welcomed the world's first pop-up rooftop 'glamp' site, St Jerome's – The Hotel. Inhabiting the vacant rooftop of Melbourne Central shopping centre, the luxury camping ground features 25 standard 'rooms' and five 'suites' – four and five metre canvas bell tents – a guest-only communal lawn and bar, 24-hour concierge service, free tai chi and meditation classes each morning and breakfast hampers.

Yet, despite being "really well received" according to owner Jerome Borazio (co-

founder of St Jerome's Laneway Festival), it will not be around for long. Originally slated to open for six months, Borazio and his team are hoping to extend its lease to take advantage of the summer months.

St Jerome's – The Hotel epitomises the pop-up culture that Melbourne has embraced over the last few years, transforming the city into an experiential playground. "I think overall, pop-up has a reputation for providing great services and experiences," said Borazio.

In addition to St Jerome's – The Hotel, recent examples of Melbourne's pop-up

initiatives include Rue & Co, a collective of three popular eateries – Kong, Jimmy Grants and St Ali – housed in shipping containers; MPavilion, an architectural commission that saw a temporary structure erected in Queen Victoria Gardens to host public events; and the Magnum Ice-cream Pleasure Store, a design-your-own concept store set up in Emporium Melbourne shopping centre.

Tourism Victoria is actively promoting the city's burgeoning pop-up culture. Pop-up was also a major theme at the recent Insights@Melbourne media event held as part of the Australian Tourism Exchange in Melbourne in June.

Tourism Victoria's chief executive, Leigh Harry, said that Melbourne's hidden and unexpected experiences such as its laneways and hole-in-the-wall cafés have long been a signature of the city. "For international visitors, uncovering these hidden gems adds to their appreciation of Melbourne culture and enables them to rub shoulders with locals," he said.

A guest speaker at Insights@Melbourne, Bec McHenry, is the chief executive of The Space Agency, a local company specialising in activating vacant or under-utilised spaces. She said that in order for Melbourne to remain relevant and retain its title as the World's Most Liveable City it needs to stay ahead of the curve and pop-ups help to achieve that.

McHenry and her team are in the early stages of utilising pop-ups to re-energise popular tourist destinations like St Kilda's Fitzroy Street and Acland Street, which over time, have become tired.

"We are working with a number of local stakeholders to help activate Fitzroy Street and bring commercial density back to the area," she said. "We see great opportunities for businesses, both existing and newcomers. I don't think we will recognise Fitzroy Street in two years time."

Watch this space.

VIEWPOINTS

What opportunities and challenges do you currently experience in selling Melbourne city and its pop-up culture?



Monique Bayer,
owner, **Walk Melbourne Tours**

It's a good way for visitors to tap into what's local, creative and trendy right now. My

business is about sharing stories through food, so when new things pop up with a food focus, we incorporate them on tour when we can. It really affords us the opportunity to talk about that part of Melbourne's culture, which is great. The most common thing we hear is 'you wouldn't even know this was here'. They love to discover.

Pamela McMurtry,
travel specialist,
World Travel Professionals



For a traveller that may visit the same destination regularly, I like the concept of being able to offer them a different experience. However, we are selling a city that is constantly changing, and it is about having the knowledge of what is new.

Other challenges are the stability of these brands and pop-up venues when it comes to legal obligation, risk-free due diligence and insurance cover. Once we get past these, the concept of using pop-up venues for future travellers would tick the boxes from an experiential aspect and ensure that we are creating a buzz.

WHAT'S NEW

1 Dinner by Heston Blumenthal

Travellers need not visit London to indulge in the whimsical cuisine of Heston Blumenthal with the revered chef opening Dinner by Heston Blumenthal in Melbourne this month. Offering a 'modern interpretation of historic British gastronomy', the high-end restaurant will take over from where Blumenthal's The Fat Duck left off from its six-month stint at the Crown Entertainment Complex. Earlier this year, the London counterpart was awarded two stars in the coveted Michelin Guide and placed seventh in the S. Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants.

2 Spirit of Tasmania

The *Spirit of Tasmania I* and *II* have undergone one of the most extensive refurbishments in the company's history. Connecting Melbourne to Devonport in Tasmania, all passenger decks on both ships have been remodelled and fitted with new amenities including reclining lounges, two 96-seat cinemas, three bars and two eateries, a Reading Room and an arcade zone and jungle gym for the kids,

all designed by Swedish architect, Richard Nilsson of Figura. The deluxe, twin and four bed cabins have also been refreshed with a modern aesthetic. An additional 33 days of sailing have been added to the 2015/16 schedule.

3 Ultimate Winery Experiences

Ultimate Winery Experiences Australia's 2016/2017 is featuring several behind-the-scenes tours. A unique glimpse into the history of the Gramp family who created the world-renowned Australian wine brand, Jacob's Creek, is a highlight of the programme. The new tour of the Jacob's Creek Visitor Centre in South Australia's Barossa Valley visits the Steingarten Vineyard, the original family home and the vast kitchen garden, and includes lunch and a wine master class. Other new tours are available in most states of Australia.

4 Oaks Elan Darwin

Formerly Elan Soho Suites, the 4.5-star, 319-room Oaks Elan Darwin is the destination's newest hotel development. It features contemporary rooms in addition



to self-contained, one- and two-bedroom apartments that offer views of the harbour, Frances Bay and city centre.

5 The Old Clare Hotel

The Old Clare Hotel in Chippendale is the latest hotel to open in Sydney, located on the historical site of the former Carlton and United Brewery Administration Building. The hotel is the first Unlisted

Collection: property in Australia and remains true to the group's specialisation of restoring and readapting heritage listed buildings. The Old Clare features 62 keys, a rooftop pool and bar, a meeting room in the building's original boardroom and three independent restaurants including Silvereye, headed by Sam Miller the former executive sous chef of Noma.

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Destination Brunei

Of gold domes and minarets

Brunei's Islamic tours are steadily gaining traction among Muslim travellers from South-east Asia. By S Puvaneswary

The unanticipated international media attention Brunei received when it imposed Shariah law in 2014 has helped tour operators to further promote Islamic tour packages in the country.

Khiril Zainie, managing director, MegaBorneo Tour Planner, said: "We have been promoting Muslim tour packages for three years, but the unexpected free publicity has also created more awareness and interest among the Muslim communities in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia to visit Brunei.

"It also helps that halal food is easily available throughout Brunei and hotel rates are reasonable, especially (vital for) price-sensitive markets like Malaysia as the ringgit had also depreciated.

"Four-star hotel rates are also much cheaper than its ASEAN neighbours. A four-star hotel contract rate in Brunei is between B\$80 (US\$60) and B\$120 per night, which is equivalent to a budget hotel in Singapore," Khiril added.

Freme Travel Services' Islamic sight-seeing tour packages are well received by Malaysians, especially from the predominantly Muslim states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Johor, said inbound & MICE division manager, Sugumaran Nair.

According to Nair, religious depart-



Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, one of Brunei's key attractions for Muslim visitors

ments from Malaysia are keen to travel to Brunei to meet with their Bruneian counterparts and learn more about the implementation of Shariah, while students and teachers visit religious educational institutions to see how training is conducted.

The company is also keen to replicate its success in the Malaysian market with Indonesians too. For Indonesian Muslims, Brunei is a stopover when they fly on Royal Brunei Airlines to perform Umrah or Hajj in Mecca.

"We hope to tap this (pilgrimage) market as well as Muslim tourists from Indonesia visiting Brunei for a short break," said Sugumaran.

"We are now promoting Muslim sight-seeing tours to Indonesia through our counterparts. Visits to mosques are combined with visits to famous tourist attractions such as Kampong Ayer and The Royal Regalia Museum."

Not all tour operators are reporting increased business from the recent

Destination in numbers

58,038

Number of tourist arrivals to Brunei by air in 1Q2015

3,648

Total number of hotel rooms in Brunei as of June 2015

3.5

Average number of days foreign tourists spend in Brunei

media attention on Brunei though.

Said Haironni Kamis, senior manager, marketing and product development at Darussalam Holdings, the appointed agent for Brunei Tourism: "News on Shariah law in Brunei combined with the slowdown in the economy (led to) a drop in inbound tourists.

"However, we get an equal number of Muslims and non-Muslims, mainly from Malaysia and Singapore, who are interested in our packages."

VIEWPOINTS Is Islamic tourism a big draw for visitors to Brunei?



Uzaidi Udanis, general manager, VacAsia Tours & Travel Malaysia

It is still very small and attracts religious associations and Malay teachers associations who want to explore what the sultanate has to offer in this area. What (Brunei) needs are more attractions to entice people to visit the sultanate first, then Islamic tourism will be an add-on for those who wish to learn more about the local culture and religion.



Adam Kamal, CEO, Rakyat Travel Malaysia

Islamic tourism is what differentiates this destination from the region. We have seen an increase in demand for Islamic tours in Brunei from our Muslim groups in East Malaysia who use Royal Brunei Airlines for their Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages. We have converted transits in Brunei to one- or two-night stays as part of efforts to promote Islamic heritage in the country.

WHAT'S NEW



From left: Sumbiling Eco Village; Freme Travel's Rainforest Lodge; Brunei Maritime Museum

1 Sumbiling Eco Village

Sumbiling Eco Village in Temburong District offers a comfortable stay surrounded by shady trees and new growth forests. The village is located right on the banks of an upstream stretch of the Temburong River. The eco-lodge features fully-functioning toilets, three rooms, while there are five tents for those who wish to experience camping amid nature.

2 Freme Travel's Adventure Course and Rainforest Lodge

In early 2015, Freme Travel Services introduced its new Adventure Course and refurbished Rainforest Lodge.

The lodge can accommodate more than 40 people in wooden bunker beds and a further 15 in large tents. It also boasts a new terrace dining area and kitchen.

Highlights of the new adventure course include a 15m-long flying fox, a high rope bridge course, a birdwatching platform and a viewing tower.

3 Brunei Darussalam Maritime Museum

Located at Kota Batu, Brunei Darussalam Maritime Museum was opened in March 2015. It showcases the sultanate's history as a maritime trade empire and is a repository of the country's maritime history.

The museum is made up of three

viewing galleries – The Brunei Ship Wreck Gallery, The Brunei Water Vessels Gallery and Temporary Gallery. The Temporary Gallery currently showcases the cultural maritime exchange between China and Brunei.

The museum is open from Saturday to Thursday from 09.00 to 17.00.

4 Bintudoh Greenspring Resort

Bintudoh Greenspring Resort opened in March this year in Tutong District, 45km from Bandar Seri Begawan.

The resort comprises six chalets and a 14-pax dormitory, accommodating a maximum of 26 people. Facilities include

a multipurpose hall and a café. Guests can enjoy fishing at the fish pond or stroll in the garden.

5 MV Sentosa ferry cruise

MV Sentosa ferry cruise provides guests a comfortable option of touring Brunei River and Kampong Ayer (Water Village). Operated by Sha-Zan Marine, the service was launched in mid-November 2014.

The vessel can hold 60 passengers and has fully enclosed air-conditioned decks. It can also be chartered for private functions, meetings and trips to Temburong District.

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Destination India

Inviting the world to India's north-east

The north-eastern region is rich in natural sights and wildlife; the rugged mountains in Arunachal Pradesh are pictured here



India is investing in infrastructure improvements and attraction developments in the region to raise its profile as a tourism destination to behold, reports **Rohit Kaul**

India's north-eastern region, though largely unexplored, has recorded a 40 per cent spike in foreign tourist arrivals, achieving 1,18,552 footfalls in 2014. The performance is likely a result of the Ministry of Tourism's recent initiatives to raise the appeal of the region which comprises the states of Assam, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.

The ministry has sanctioned 29 tourism projects for the north-eastern states throughout 2014 and 2015. They include nine projects in Nagaland, eight in Sikkim, five in Manipur, four in Arunachal Pradesh, and three in Mizoram. On top of these efforts, the national government

had also pledged Rs 30 billion (US\$454.3 million) for the development of national highways and state roads in the region last year.

And to promote the region's offerings, the ministry is providing complimentary space to tourism representatives in India pavilions at major international travel fairs and exhibitions.

These come on top of the 3rd International Tourism Mart which was organised in Meghalaya state last October to highlight the region's tourism potential. More than 50 buyers from ASEAN and SAARC countries as well as Japan, South Korea, Australia, France, Spain, Russia, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, the UK and the US participated in the mart.

largest being Casper 2 which can seat 260 guests in a theatr setting.

2 Regenta Orko's Kolkata

The four-star Regenta Orko's Kolkata, a property of Royal Orchid Hotels, is built with business travellers in mind. Located in Kasba, a popular shopping district, the hotel offers standard rooms, club twin rooms, club rooms and suites, as well as more than 325m² of banquet space. Leisure facilities include a pool-side lounge on the rooftop and an all-day dining restaurant.

3 The Fern Residency, Somnath

The Fern Hotels & Resorts has opened The Fern Residency, Somnath, a mid-scale

“Such trade events help to create a positive image of the region in international markets. We expect international tourist arrivals to further growth beginning this year's inbound tourist season (which begins in October),” said E B Blah, CEO of Clara Tours in Meghalaya.

Rajkumar Das, proprietor of Kaziranga Holidays, added: “We are getting a very good response from international markets. Wildlife, tribal culture and festivals, especially the Hornbill Festival which takes place in Nagaland, are appealing to foreign tourists. We are getting a number of enquiries for the coming travel season beginning October. Europe and South Asia are key markets for us.”

Moving forward the ministry is look-

business hotel in the Gir-Somnath district of Gujarat. Its interior reflects the rich culture of the Gujarat region through bright colours and art pieces.

There are 56 guestrooms across four categories – Winter Green, Winter Green Premium, Fern Club, Hazel Suite – as well as a restaurant and two banquet halls.

4 Smaaash

This sports-centric entertainment and gaming centre was recently launched in DLF Cyber Hub, Gurgaon. It offers a range of games that combine the best of sports, music and dining to deliver an interactive and innovative experience. For instance, football fans can challenge the supersonic goalkeeper in the Football Super Keeper

VIEWPOINTS

What is needed to grow tourist arrivals into the north-east region?



Mahesh Sharma, tourism minister, India

We feel that there is an immense potential in the region that has to be tapped. A major obstacle is connectivity.

We are looking to address

this issue. The government will help to create the necessary infrastructure and other facilities required for promoting tourism in the region.

Arun Anand, managing director, Midtown Travel



I think there is need to create more awareness about the various tourism destinations in the north-east.

Regional connectivity between the north-eastern states should be considered by the government. Hotel inventory across different categories must be added too.

ing to develop Majuli Island in the Brahmaputra River of Assam as a destination for cruise tourism. Majuli Island is believed to be the largest river island in the world and has a population of tribal dwellers. It is also working on a proposal to push for the island destination to be awarded World Heritage Site status.

Plans have also been drawn for an integrated development comprising eco tourism, adventure, sports and wellness attractions surrounding Serlui B Dam in the state of Mizoram.

However, some tour operators opined that a lot more must be done before the north-eastern region can realise its true tourism potential.

Amitabh Sarma, manager, operations & sales with JTI Holidays, remarked: “There has been a substantial amount of (destination) promotion but we need a more fool-proof plan and greater attention on developing infrastructure. Promoting the destination as a remote land is not going to work in the long run.

“Improved air connectivity is required. We have only two international flight sectors: Bangkok-Guwahati and Guwahati-Paro. That's not enough. Due to a lack of proper road connectivity in the north-east, a tourist has to return to a transit point several times.”

WHAT'S NEW

1 Novotel Imagica Khopoli

AccorHotels has opened its first integrated hotel and resort property in India. The Novotel Imagica Khopoli is located close to Adlabs Imagica and Aquamagica theme parks, making it ideal for family vacationers and those looking to escape the bustling city.

The hotel features 116 guestrooms overlooking the park, pool and the lush Sahyadri Mountains. There are plans to add another 171 rooms and suites later this year, including well-designed rooms for specially-abled guests.

Dining facilities include The Square all-day dining restaurant, Tubby's Bistro, Nitro Bar and Flotz pool bar. The hotel offers five venues for business events, the



attraction. After all the excitement, visitors wind down at Unforked Café & Bar, a multi-cuisine dining outlet.

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Relocation trends in Asia-



Lanson Place Hotel, Hong Kong



Fraser Residence Kuala Lumpur



“With advanced technology, Millennials are signing shorter-term tenancies, wanting to conduct business faster and more efficiently.”

Marc Hediger
CEO, Lanson Place Hospitality Management



“Younger executives are being deployed for overseas assignments and as such there is also less need to accommodate an entire family.”

Choe Peng Sum
CEO, Frasers Hospitality

3 hottest relocation cities in Asia now and why

Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai are still the hottest Asian cities to relocate to, despite capital investments trending outward from these cities.

Considered the gateway to China, Hong Kong consistently offers an exciting city for expats: easy to reside in, great to establish business networks and very family friendly. Within the past 10 years, the city has seen a 50 per cent growth in the extended stay market.

Global MNCs will also easily consider relocating their employees to Hong Kong's friendly neighbouring competitor cities though, specifically Singapore or Shanghai.

Singapore saw a 30.4 per cent increase in serviced apartment supply last year and is perceived to be a city as easy to move to as Hong Kong. Shanghai continues to boom; although serviced apartment inventory have quadrupled in the past four years, occupancies are still in the 80 per cent levels. We have just announced our fifth property there.

Aside from these three established key cities in Asia, Lanson Place residents are also relocating to other prime cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila. Most offer more affordable living, but are also exciting up-and-coming business destinations.

What's trending

We've seen a shift in resident demographics throughout all our properties in Asia-Pacific, mostly in the past two years. With

advanced technology, Millennials are signing shorter-term tenancies, wanting to conduct business faster and more efficiently. Baby boomers and Gen X are residing without families, while younger families are seeking smaller and more versatile units.

More significantly, residents who have been educated abroad are coming back to their own countries and relocating from within the Asia-Pacific region. In China, corporations are expanding their companies to second- and third-tier cities but are still seeking a comfortable yet affordable lifestyle for their employees.

How operators match changing trends

Lanson Place has specifically introduced a third business model called Serviced Suites by Lanson Place to address the changing trends and needs of corporates relocating.

This lean, efficient and contemporary serviced apartment style not only provides a higher return in investment for developers but most importantly, it offers residents a niche lifestyle, no matter the location or purpose of their residency.

Smaller units are creatively designed with unique combined open living and working spaces; public areas are the extension of their homes offering seamless connectivity throughout the entire development; 'grab n go' F&B concepts and energising activities promote well-being. This model forms the majority of pipeline deals for Lanson Place, be it in secondary locations in key gateway cities or 1.5-tier cities within China.

3 hottest relocation cities in Asia now and why

Singapore – the world's number one city for business friendliness – remains one of the hottest business destinations in Asia. A key gateway city for the South-east Asian market, it is known for its open-trade environment, corruption-free government and high quality of living, attracting large MNCs pursuing business opportunities in the region.

Kuala Lumpur has become an increasingly attractive business destination particularly for global manufacturers, offering lower tax and stricter intellectual property protection regimes, in comparison with other markets like China. It is ranked among the top 15 countries most favoured by MNCs in 2014-2016 with various government incentives for foreign companies geared towards making Malaysia a gateway to the ASEAN market.

Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi have also been successful in attracting foreign investment, quickly becoming an important market for companies looking to expand into second- and third-tier cities in Asia. Some of our residents who have completed their assignments in Jakarta have been relocated to Vietnam to take on new assignments.

What's trending

We have observed that overseas assignments are increasingly shorter, on a more regular basis of between two weeks to a month, as opposed to the previous trend of longer assignments of up to three

months at a time. Younger executives are being deployed for overseas assignments and as such there is also less need to accommodate an entire family. These, plus the increased overall appreciation of the advantages of serviced apartments, have contributed to the rising adoption rate of our serviced apartments in general, and the one- and two-bedroom apartments in particular.

Most companies also now offer staff flexi-benefits packages as a measure to improve cost efficiency, where expatriates have the option of cashing in on their allocated accommodation expense if it is not fully utilised. This has led some expatriates to either opt for more affordable alternatives or shorten their length of stay.

How operators match changing trends

Plans are in place to further boost our inventory in these three cities as part of our goal of achieving 30,000 apartments units globally by 2019.

With the trend of shorter stays in mind, our newer properties have been configured with a larger number of one- and two-bedroom apartments to cater to more business executives who now tend to travel on their own, while at the same time maintaining the spacious defined living, kitchen, bedroom and study areas our serviced apartments are known for.

We also work closely with our corporate clients to better understand their evolving needs and customise solutions to complement their travel and relocation policies.

Pacific

Companies are relocating younger employees and serviced apartment operators in the region are responding with new products to cater to this market. Major players explain to Raini Hamdi how they are keeping up with the times



Oakwood Residence Sukhumvit
Thonglor Bangkok



Ascott Kuningan Jakarta



“(We notice) an increase in short-term assignments as companies look to plug skills gaps, contain costs and appeal to younger workers...”

Craig Ryan
Managing director, Asia-Pacific, Oakwood Worldwide



“Younger executives are seeking smart living that integrates work, rest and play, as well as unique, personalised and authentic local experiences...”

Tony Soh
Chief corporate officer, The Ascott Limited

3 hottest relocation cities in Asia now and why

Both Singapore and Hong Kong lead the relocation markets in Asia-Pacific as they continue to serve as business hubs for multinational organisations.

As one of the fastest-growing economies in the region, China is also a key relocation market. Encouraged by the Chinese government's opening up and increased pace of reform, more companies are establishing operations in China's emerging cities in the mid-west. This trend, combined with the increased demand for serviced apartment in primary cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, is stimulating new serviced apartment projects, resulting in rapid development and progression across China.

Oakwood Worldwide has an aggressive expansion plan for China, with a second property in Beijing, one in Sanya and Haikou in the pipeline. We have also expanded our Asia-Pacific operations with the opening of an office in Hong Kong to meet the increased demand for serviced apartments in the region.

What's trending

Here are some of the key trends we have noticed in the global mobility industry.

There is an increase in short-term assignments as companies look to plug skills gaps, contain costs and appeal to younger workers who want to broaden their experience. As reported in the 2014 Brookfield Global Relocation Trends Survey, in 2014 the average age of assignees dropped, where the 30- to 39-year-old age bracket had one of

the highest percentages of international assignees (33 per cent), taking over from the 50- to 59-year-old age bracket.

Furthermore, continued growth in the number of assignments in Asia-Pacific is expected due to the increase in business travel. Continuous growth of emerging markets is also expected as companies continue to broaden their reach and send assignees as project work increases.

How operators match changing trends

Oakwood Worldwide has a four-pronged approach in preparing to meet the needs that will result from the aforementioned trends.

First, a robust development strategy. Oakwood Worldwide is looking to double our current Asia-Pacific branded portfolio of 28 properties over the next three to five years.

Then there was the launch of a hotel desk at the end of 2014 to give clients access to accommodation in smaller and remote cities where serviced apartments are not as readily available. This also provides flexibility for short- to medium- and long-term stays.

Oakwood Worldwide also plans to strengthen our vetted supplier network. In the Asia-Pacific, the company offers more than 400 properties across the region through local network partners.

Lastly, by evolving our business model and using Lanyon to contract rates from serviced apartment providers and hotels, we help organisations save time and resources, offering greater efficiency throughout the relocation.

3 hottest relocation cities in Asia now and why

Indonesia, the Philippines and China.

Indonesia is the biggest economy in South-east Asia while the Philippines' strong economic fundamentals continue to attract foreign investors, in particular the back-office processing operations sector.

In China, demand for serviced residences remains strong in the first- and second-tier cities of Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou.

Given the strong economic potential of Asia, we will continue to deepen our presence and grow our network in Asia. We have expanded Ascott's presence in key cities such as Jakarta, Manila and Shanghai with the opening of Ascott Kuningan Jakarta, Ascott Bonifacio Global City Manila and Ascott Heng Shan Shanghai recently.

What's trending

With increasing talent mobility, our serviced residences continue to receive many guests who stay for an extended period of a month or more for relocation or project assignments.

As travellers become savvier and companies tighten their travel budgets, they recognise the value that serviced residences provide as compared to traditional hotels.

They appreciate the flexibility for project team members to share an apartment while enjoying the privacy of individual bedrooms and the convenience of a kitchen.

Younger executives are seeking smart living that integrates work, rest and play, as well as unique, personalised and authentic local experiences when they are overseas.

Staying healthy while on the move is also a trend.

How operators match changing trends

By constantly innovating and looking at new ways to delight guests.

Ascott is the first global serviced residence company to embrace smart home technologies. We have forged an exclusive partnership with Samsung Asia to jointly develop smart solutions customised for serviced residences. Guests will be able to use their mobile or wearable devices to control washing machines, refrigerators, smart TVs and the like.

We aim to test-bed the technologies at selected Ascott serviced residences by the first half of 2016, with plans to roll it out to our properties worldwide in phases.

We have also launched the Ascott Lifestyle programme, offering guests bespoke cultural, gastronomic, local and wellness experiences.

For instance, to help guests settle in a new city, there are local language classes and guided tours of the local market. Guests can stay fit by exploring the neighbourhood they are in with our customised jogging routes.

There are also cultural programmes such as batik making workshops and personal cooking sessions that are conducted right in their apartment.

Destination Taiwan

Waving the green flag high

Taiwan is doing its best to be more welcoming to Muslim travellers by providing appropriate facilities



The Chinese destination is making adjustments to attract more Muslim travellers, reports Paige Lee Pei Qi

Taiwan is stepping up to capture a slice of the Muslim travellers' market by transforming the country into a Muslim-friendly destination.

Taiwan Tourism Bureau director-general David Hsieh said Taiwan welcomed around 180,000 visitors from Muslim-majority markets in 2014, up 12.5 per cent from a year ago.

He said: "Given that Muslims comprise nearly a quarter of the global population, there's still plenty of room for Taiwan to tap into this segment of the global market."

As part of these efforts, an additional 24 travel-related businesses and facilities were recently awarded Halal certification at a ceremony in Taipei City in May this year. This brings the number to 70 nationwide, including the National Palace Museum and Taipei 101, as well as hotels and restaurants in tourism hot spots like Alishan and Sun Moon Lake.

The certified restaurants and hotels offer a wide range of food, including Indian, Thai, Turkish and Egyptian cuisine, according to the bureau, which has been working with the Taipei-based Chinese Muslims Association over the past few years to establish the certification.

For example Muslim travellers will be able to feel at home in the Regent Taipei, whose restaurant, Azie, was awarded the Muslim-friendly Restaurant certification last year.

The hotel also rolled out a package to offer the Muslim community the signature Regent experience. The Muslim guest accommodation package provides access to guestrooms that come with a prayer rug, a compass, a Quran and Salat schedules. Restrooms in these guestrooms are furnished with "smart" toilets with built-in bidets.

Michael B Gaehler, general manager of Regent Taipei, said: "We have since

observed an increase in Muslim guests of around five to seven per cent since we started this initiative."

The hotel's Muslim guests largely hail from South-east Asian markets such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Middle East, according to Gaehler. He said: "We keep enhancing (our property) to ensure every Muslim visitor feels at home when staying with us."

According to Hsieh, all of Taiwan's 13 national scenic areas under its administration are now equipped with Muslim-friendly facilities. "Of note, a Muslim prayer room opened in January at the Taipei Main Station, the first in a domestic public transportation hub," he said.

The bureau is targeting to raise the number of Muslim tourists to 200,000, a 10 per cent increase this year compared with the last, said Hsieh.

Taiwan is now ranked as the 10th best destination for Muslim travellers outside Organisation of Islamic Cooperation member states, according to the recently released Global Muslim Travel Index.

Scoring 46.2 across a range of faith-friendly criteria such as dining options, prayer space access and safe travel, Taiwan outperformed 33 other countries and territories to secure a top-10 finish. Globally, it ranked 36th – a positive showing for the debutant nation in the 100-strong index.

Fazal Bahardeen, CEO of Crescent Rating, a Singapore-based index compiler, said he applauds Taiwan's accomplishment. "More destinations are targeting the Muslim tourism sector like Japan and Taiwan, and it is a trend we expect to continue."

Last year, there were 108 million Muslim travellers representing 10 per cent of the global travel economy, Bahardeen said. "The industry was worth US\$145 billion, with this number forecast to reach US\$200 billion by 2020."

VIEWPOINTS

What else does Taiwan need to do to court more Muslim travellers?



Peter Kuo, president, Edison Travel Service

A simplified visa application process will help to make it more welcoming for Muslims and we are aware that the government has been researching for possibilities to make this happen.

Michael B Gaehler, general manager, Regent Taipei

Muslims are more concerned about their food and accommodation during their travels. The Taiwan Tourism Bureau has been and can continue to actively promote the Muslim-Friendly Certificate which has resulted in more and more restaurants and hotels joining this project.



WHAT'S NEW

1 Taipei Marriott Hotel

The first Marriott property made landfall in Taiwan recently with the opening of Taipei Marriott Hotel. Located 10 minutes from Songshan International Airport in Dazhi district, the five-star, 320-key hotel which reflects elements of a botanic garden is designed to be close to nature with its green development initiative.

The property features five restaurants and a bar as well as 3,000m² of function space for a maximum of 2,000 guests. The 1,260m² Grand Ballroom on the 21st level is the largest pillarless ballroom in Taiwan's international-hotel category, while an outdoor venue and a chapel are located on the rooftop garden.

2 Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel

The US\$50 million renovation of Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel, Taipei saw an overhaul of its 420 guestrooms and suites as well as the Horizon Club Lounge and the lobby level.

All upgraded guestrooms feature spectacular city views or the surrounding mountains, while the ceiling height of over three metres creates additional spaciousness. A total of 11 function rooms are available, including the lavish Far Eastern Grand Ballroom which can host 700 guests for a seminar or banquet, while the Shangri-La Ballroom can accommodate 400 guests.

3 Pingxi sky lanterns

While the Lantern Festival is widely acclaimed as one of Taiwan's tourism highlights and takes place annually during Chinese New Year, it is still possible to see and release your own lanterns into the sky in Pingxi any time of the year. Decorate and personalise your lantern before letting it drift into the sky, immortalising this picture perfect moment.

4 Eva Air

Eva Air has stepped up frequency on its Taipei-Singapore route from seven to 11-weekly flights earlier in July.

According to Eva Air chairman KW Chang, the Taipei-Singapore route has been operating with 85 per cent passenger load factor, and the increased frequency will provide flexible itinerary options.

The new scheduled flights started from June 21 between Changi Airport and Taipei's Taoyuan International Airport, and

are in addition to the carrier's existing daily flights between both cities. Additionally, a new Hello Kitty theme was created exclusively for the Eva Air B777-300ER aircraft that is now deployed on the route.

5 Hotel Proverbs Taipei

The Gloria Hotel Group opened its newest boutique hotel, Hotel Proverbs Taipei, in the heart of the business and shopping area of Da'an District. The property offers free Wi-Fi in all the 42 rooms that are sized between 33m² and 49m².

Facilities include a steak house, an outdoor pool and a fitness centre. A five-minute walk from Zhongxiao Fuxing MRT Station, the hotel is also a convenient 40-minute drive from the Taoyuan International Airport.



Destination in numbers

5 million

The number of visitor arrivals from January to June this year, up by 3.4 per cent from the same period last year

41

The percentage of visitors from China from January to June this year, a year-on-year increase of 4.3 per cent

2,955

The number of hotel enterprises in Taiwan as of July 2015, up from 2,857 last July

Destination South Korea

Gateway to a hot new city

Incheon is leveraging its modern infrastructure and rich heritage to entice longer stays, writes **Julian Ryall**



Songdo Central Park in Incheon draws visitors who enjoy a quiet stroll around the green space or cruise down the seawater canal

All too often, Incheon is seen merely as the gateway to the rest of South Korea. It is the port where the ferries that link the peninsula with China dock or, for travellers from further afield, the location of the nation's largest airport. But the city is trying hard to shake off that image and to reinvent itself into a destination in its own right.

In its favour is the fact that tens of thousands of visitors already arrive in the city every day. It just needs them to stay longer.

"This is a city that is rich in tradition, history, nature and culture and, as we are located on the western coast of the Korean peninsula, we have around 150 beautiful islands to explore," said Ray Cho, head of overseas marketing for the Incheon Tourism Organisation.

Cho and his team is looking to build on the 949,693 overseas visitors to the city in 2013, up from less than 858,000

in the previous year, and points to attractions new and old as incentives for tourists.

Incheon is the birthplace of *jajangmyun*, a popular noodle dish, is the location of South Korea's only Chinatown, and went down in history for the daring Incheon landings, masterminded by American general Douglas MacArthur and which hastened the end of the Korean War.

Added to the heritage are attractions that put the city on the leading-edge of Asian design, culture, architecture and entertainment. Incheon hosted the 2014 Asian Games, a decision that triggered a bout of construction of state-of-the-art sporting venues, while additional hotels were also opened to meet demand.

"Our guests are fairly evenly split between domestic and international travellers, with the majority of our foreign visitors coming from Europe, thanks to our affiliation with the Designer Hotels or-

ganisation," said Vanessa Lee, marketing supervisor for the Nest Hotel Incheon.

The city has also benefitted – perhaps unwittingly – from being used as a backdrop for a number of Korean films, television dramas and commercials, many of which have been aired overseas.

My Love from the Star, for example, has been sold in 20 countries around the world, including Japan, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Jin-Man Kim, CEO of Hyundai Marine Leisure, told the *Daily* that the "series has really helped to promote the city across Asia".

"Since it was shown in China, I have had a lot more Chinese travellers coming on my cruise ships, with Chinese companies running incentive trips for their staff accounting for most of my customers now," said Kim.

Encouraged by good business from China, Kim has opened an office in the city of Weihai, across the Yellow Sea from

VIEWPOINT

What is needed to make Incheon a top destination for both domestic and international visitors?



Bella Lee, head of public relations, The Oakwood Premier Incheon

The city lacks a specific tourist hub, although it has Songdo (drawing attention) as an international business centre. Above all, Incheon needs to create a broad promotional strategy to communicate the city's attractions.

Incheon. At present, ferries ply between Incheon and 10 Chinese ports, with demand from Chinese tourists rising prominently, he said.

For visitors, the newly developed Songdo International City is a must-see.

"It has many colours and eye-catching, modern buildings, as well as business and residential areas that use eco-technology. And it is developing into a global economic hub," Lee remarked.

Key attractions include the Ocean Scope observatory, the G-Tower and the NC Cube Canal Walk, an extensive retail district with more than 60 fashion stores, many of which offer tax refunds for overseas visitors.

Cho said: "We are working hard and using a variety of tools to promote Incheon as an attractive destination for international tourists.

"We are participating in international exhibitions, travel marts and roadshows, often with the Korea Tourism Organisation, to spread the word about the diverse attractions of Incheon – and of South Korea more generally – world-wide."

WHAT'S NEW

1 Incheon Tourism Organisation

Incheon established its very own dedicated travel promotion unit with the inauguration of the Incheon Tourism Organisation on September 22. The new office takes over travel-related duties of the Incheon Development & Tourism Corporation, and is tasked with promoting and marketing the city and major events that it is hosting.

2 Jack Nicklaus Golf Club Korea

The property has completed a major upgrade and redesign ahead of its hosting of the prestigious 2015 Presidents Cup this month. All 18 holes have been improved, with particular care lavished on the greens before the two teams, representing the US and the rest of the world, tee off.

3 Incheon International Airport's city tours

The operator of Incheon International Airport is providing free sight-seeing tours of some of the best nearby attrac-



Gyeong Won Jae Ambassador Hotel, Incheon; The Jack Nicklaus Golf Club Korea

tions. The programmes feature local temples, Incheon's Chinatown district, the 21km long bridge that links the airport with the city, and a host of other locations that people simply passing through might never experience. The tours fill up fast, so book ahead to avoid disappointment.

4 Hyundai Marine Leisure

Hyundai Marine Leisure is about to launch a new cruise linking Incheon with

Seoul. The new service, aboard one of the company's state-of-the-art party vessels, will take four hours to complete a one-way trip, giving up to 1,000 passengers plenty of time to enjoy the restaurant, bars and the scenery of the Han River.

5 Gyeong Won Jae Ambassador Hotel

Situated in Songdo Central Park, Gyeong Won Jae Ambassador Hotel, Incheon

is a Korean-style traditional hotel that will allow guests to enjoy the tranquility of its surroundings while contemplating the beauty of ancient Korea. The hotel takes its name, Gyeong Won Jae, from Incheon's former name during the Goryeo Dynasty. Opening this May, it will offer two Presidential Suites, 12 Deluxe Suites, 16 Standard Rooms and a Gyeong Won Roo banquet hall for up to 250 pax.



Invitation to a celebration

Hotels and travel companies are marking Singapore's 50th birthday with a multitude of related products and offers



Tourists are invited to join in Singapore's big birthday bash as local businesses roll out offers. By **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

In a bid to reverse slowing visitor figures, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has launched a S\$20 million (US\$14.8 million) global marketing campaign that takes advantage of the nation's 50th birthday celebration.

From May to December 2015, visitors will be offered a range of promotional airfares, hotel stays, retail offerings, dining deals and discounted admissions to attractions. The campaign will be marketed in key source markets like Indonesia, China, India, the Philippines, Japan and Vietnam.

Lynette Pang, assistant chief executive of STB's marketing group, said: "2015 is not only a tremendous milestone for Singapore, but also an opportunity for STB to leverage the international attention to ramp up marketing efforts for the destination."

"SG50 (as the year-long celebration is known) is a once-in-a-lifetime event for Singapore and has caught the interest of the world, placing us on numerous lists of top places to visit. With the exciting *Golden Jubilee* campaign, we look forward to celebrating this milestone with both locals and international visitors."

Coming under the *Golden Jubilee* campaign is a suite of perks by MasterCard.

Cardholders travelling to Singapore this year will receive a Golden Jubilee MasterCard Prepaid Card containing S\$50 (US\$35.70) in stored value by spending a minimum of S\$800, or S\$600

using a MasterCard card, at any of the 16 participating shopping malls across the island. These include popular spots such as Paragon, VivoCity, Suntec City, Plaza Singapura and 313@somerset.

Other privileges include being eligible to participate in a monthly draw to win an all-expenses-paid trip back to Singapore, as well as being entitled to an array of discount deals for airfares, hotel stays, shopping, dining and attraction tickets.

Hoteliers are joining in with their own perks for travellers who choose to visit Singapore during the year-long birthday celebration. More than 35 hotels, including Park Hotel Group and Sheraton Towers Singapore, have committed to offering a Pay Two, Stay Three offer, while children will enjoy complimentary access to several local attractions.

Looking to push demand through its travel agency partners, The Pan Pacific Hotels Group (PPHG) is offering 50 per cent savings for selected travel consultants who book rooms at its two Pan Pacific and three Parkroyal hotels in Singapore through the group's website.

Timur Senturk, PPHG's vice president, operations, ASEAN, said: "With many large-scale celebratory events planned throughout the year, we see SG50 as a great opportunity to heighten awareness and excitement of Singapore."

The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore

VIEWPOINTS

How are you leveraging SG50 to sell Singapore?



Timur Senturk, vice president, operations, ASEAN, Pan Pacific Hotels Group

We want to honour the meaning of SG50, which is about celebrating the pioneering spirit and Singapore's past achievements, so we are also looking at heritage-themed promotions and packages that encourage both locals and visitors to journey through its history and rediscover Singapore.

Selina Chavry, regional director, Asia, Pacific World

Singapore may be short in history but the country has succeeded gloriously in its development during its 50 years of independence. We can explore bringing the group through the transformation of Singapore by highlighting housing from a kampung slum in Pulau Ubin to a cosmopolitan city in The Pinnacle@Duxton.



is offering a *Celebrate Singapore, Celebrate You* room package "to leverage the jubilant nationwide atmosphere", said director of public relations & marketing communications, Nathalyn Fong.

The package includes overnight accommodation, buffet breakfast, S\$50 dining credit, a bottle of champagne and a limited-edition Ritz-Carlton Singapore 50 lion beanie memento.

Judy Lum, Tour East's group vice president of sales and marketing, said: "SG50

gives us a great reason to tell the Singapore Story from the past 50 years to present-day Singapore and to the future.

"We are currently looking at reiterating SG50 to give it a strong significance and convey the message that some packages come once in 50 years," Lum added. For instance, tourists would be more compelled to retrace the Singapore history during the World War II with visits to the Changi Chapel and Museum and Kranji War Memorial.

WHAT'S NEW

1 The South Beach

The widely anticipated hotel development, The South Beach, has opened its doors in September as part of its preview phase, ahead of its official opening later this year. Designed by Philippe Starck, the 654-key hotel gives off a lively, artistic vibe and offers plenty of comfortable spaces for guests to mingle or relax alone. Rooms and suites are large, while F&B options ADHD (All Day Hotel Dining), Laugh bar and Court Martial Bar for now – are attractive and inviting.

Other facilities include two sky gardens, two infinity swimming pools and a gym.

The South Beach's grand ballroom is set to be completed by end October, and will cater to events such as corporate functions and weddings.

2 Park Hotel Alexandra

Park Hotel Group has opened the Park Hotel Alexandra on the fringe of the CBD, placing the 443-key property close to business and leisure districts.

The sleek building houses beautifully appointed rooms that offer either views of an azure infinity pool or unobstructed



From left: Superior room at Park Hotel Alexandra, Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

skyline views of the picturesque Southern Ridges, four function rooms that can be combined to accommodate up to 150 pax, and an elevated pool deck that is perfect for cocktail receptions and private events.

Singapore's famous shopping district Orchard Road and island retreat Sentosa are 10 minutes away, while Singapore Changi Airport is only a half-hour's drive.

3 Colony

The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore has unveiled a new restaurant, Colony, on level three. The dining destination features

eight open concept kitchens with 'live' culinary showmanship, and serves up delicious Malaysian, Indonesian, Indian, Chinese and Western dishes. Colony can seat a maximum of 260 persons and boasts a flexible space that can be configured accordingly based on request.

4 Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

The seven-storey 8,500m² Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum in the National University of Singapore Faculty of Science is the city-state's first and only natural history museum.

Visitors can see more than 2,000 specimens housed across 15 zones in the exhibition gallery. The main gallery showcases the history and biodiversity of plants and animals, while the heritage gallery features Singapore's natural history and treasures.

Tickets are available from Sistic and are priced from S\$20 (US\$14) for adults and S\$11 for children.

5 The Club

Luxury boutique hotel The Club has completed an extensive renovation to give it refreshed guestrooms and new dining destina-

tions. Located on Ann Siang Hill in a colonial building built in the 1900s, The Club's 20 guestrooms now feature soothing earth tones, eclectic art accessories and bespoke furniture.

Its popular B28 underground whisky bar is now joined by a lounge café and bar, a champagne yard, a rooftop bar and the second restaurant by The Disgruntled Chef. Open for private event hire are Tiger's Milk and The Champagne Yard, with the former able to accommodate private gatherings of 110 guests, and the latter offering space for 24 guests, cocktail style.



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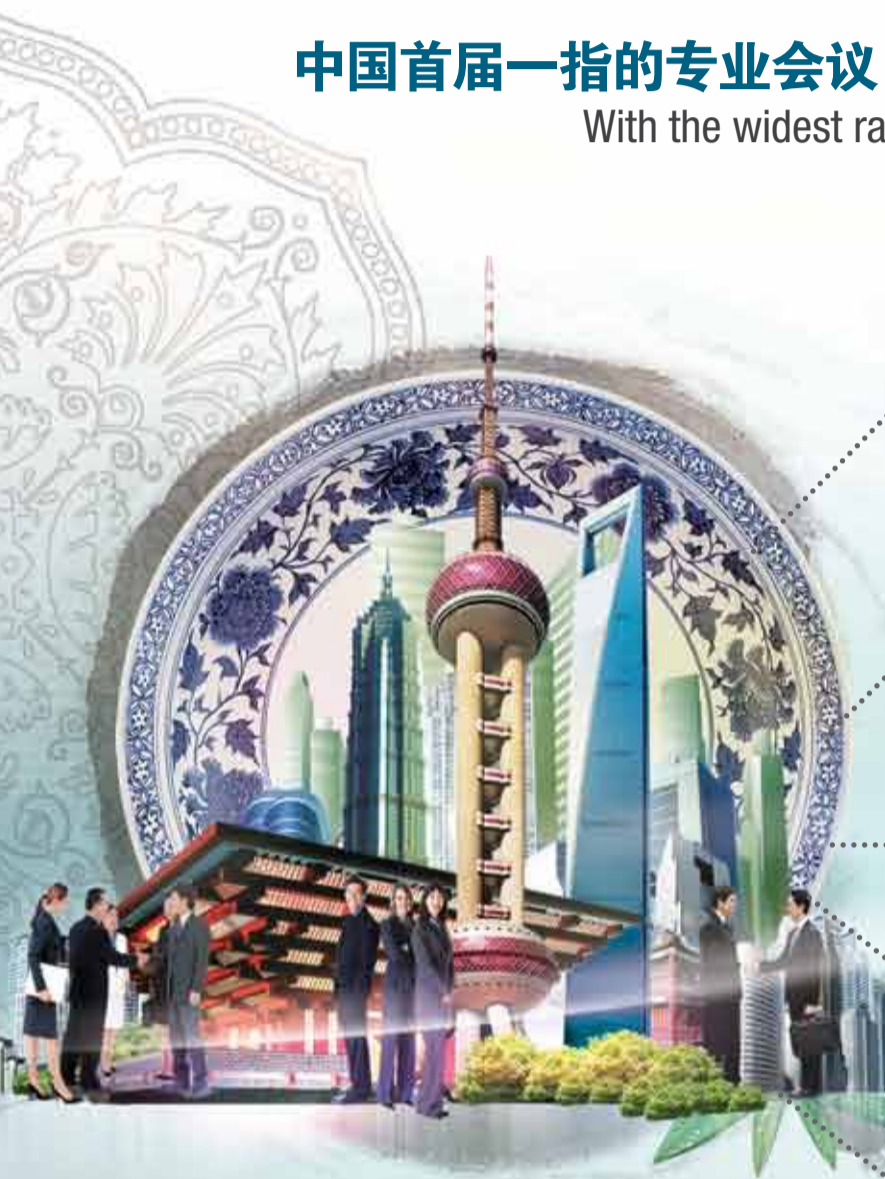


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“We received **very interesting leads** as early as during the first day of business appointments.”

Exhibitor Melia Hotel International, China Ruben Casas, Senior Director of Sales & Marketing Asia-Pacific

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买家湖南途易国际旅行社，中国 Joyson Chen, 总经理

“Since **many professionals in the MICE and tourism industry** participate at IT&CM China, I was able to make contacts and networks.”

Media Korea Tourism News, Korea Kim Eun Kyung, Reporter

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Destination Cambodia

Building for further growth

Improved roads, new hotels and airport upgrades will help Cambodia to grow footfalls. By **Greg Lowe**

Efforts made by tourism authorities and trade players to promote the Sihanoukville coastal destination are reaping results



dimitri2285.com

Tourism in Cambodia continued to grow steadily over the past year, albeit at a slower rate than the record 24.4 per cent in 2012, and the destination remains on track for another record year though it is expected to fall short of the target of five million arrivals.

While most visitors, especially those from longhaul markets, do so as part of a wider multi-destination tour of South-east Asia, a growing number of FIT and group tourists are starting to spend more time in the country or view it as a standalone destination in its own right.

Cambodia is also very China-friendly,

with many hotels catering for this market, especially in Siem Reap. As a result, China arrivals grew by almost 22 per cent during the first half of 2015, making it Cambodia's second largest source market.

However, distribution of footfalls remains an issue. The vast majority of visitors travel within the confines of the capital Phnom Penh and the Angkor Wat temple complex at Siem Reap. Hoteliers said it is common for visitors to the capital to cut short their stay due to a lack of cultural attractions, with the average leisure guest chalking up one or two nights there.

Phnom Penh's single casino has ben-

efitted from restrictions in Macau which is funnelling thousands of gamblers into the city, mostly from China.

In terms of new infrastructure developments, a number of key roads are being improved, notably Route 6 between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Cambodia Airports is expanding capacity at both Phnom Penh and Siem Reap facilities to five million passengers and to 500,000 at Sihanoukville with the overhaul due to be completed within the first half of next year. The airport operator is forecasting double-digit growth in 2016.

Sihanoukville, the country's premier beach destination, is also growing in

Destination in numbers

2.3 million

The number of international visitors to Cambodia in 1H2015, up 4.6 per cent from the same period last year

483,000

The number of Vietnamese visitors to Cambodia in 1H2015, up 14.5 per cent from the same period last year. Vietnam is Cambodia's top source market, followed by China with 335,000 arrivals, up 21.8 per cent

53.6 per cent

The average occupancy across Cambodia's hotels in 1H2015, up six per cent from the same period a year earlier, according to STR Global

strength. Marketing activities by tourism authorities and the trade have been instrumental in developing coastal areas in the country. Five new resorts are being built on Otres Beach and are due to open before 2016's low season. New resorts including Alila Villas Koh Russey and AKARYN Cambodia Koh Krabey are both due to come online later next year.

While local politics can cause some disruption, matters are expected to remain calm until elections in 2018. As a result, arrivals are expected to continue to the current moderate growth trend throughout 2016.

WHAT'S NEW



From left: Sokha Phnom Penh Hotel & Residence; Phum Baiteng

1 Sokha Phnom Penh Hotel & Residence

Located a stone's throw from the Royal Palace on the Chroy Changvar peninsula, Sokha Phnom Penh is one of the city's newest and largest properties. Catering for higher end guests en masse, the property boasts 523 keys ranging from the entry level 52m² rooms up to the 318m² Royal Sokha Suite. There's plenty to do on property which has a choice of seven restaurants, including Japanese, Asia, Italian and Chinese, four bars, the Jasmine Spa

with 17 treatment rooms, a swimming pool and gym. Wave Club and Stardust Karaoke, which has 36 rooms, provide nighttime entertainment options.

2 Mara

The recently opened Mara Restaurant and Longue adds a new sophisticated dining and entertainment venue to the capital's burgeoning nightlife scene. The bar has become popular thanks to its cosy environment and range of cocktails, fine wines

and international beers. The menu offers a select range of well present international and Asia dishes – such as chili salt chicken, beef with red ants or tuom yum snapper fillet – each of which has been given a contemporary twist. The venue is available for events and group bookings.

3 Phum Baiteng

This 45-key property comprises 20 80m² terrace villas and 25 130m² pool villas located a mere 15 minutes drive from Siem

Reap International Airport. The luxury resort is notable for its traditional Cambodian architecture and design aesthetic – the cigar and cocktail lounge is housed in a converted century-old farmhouse. Guests can dine at either the international or Asian restaurant, while the 50m infinity pool and bar afford views over the gardens and local rice paddies. The Spa Temple offers a range of Cambodian wellness therapies in seven treatment rooms, including two double rooms, with other features including a yoga room and relaxation area.

4 Bambu Stage Siem Reap

This cultural project seeks to position Siem Reap as a creative city and combines contemporary music and dance with traditional Cambodian culture. Bambu Stage provides a platform for both local and international artists to perform together and has collaborated with a number of groups including New Cambodia Artists to produce unique shows complete with purpose-built stages and immersive experiences around the city. Shows typically run for about an hour and have a direct connection to the local culture and history, notable with the recent *Temples Decoded* series of performances. Shows are seasonal.

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Destination Vietnam

Taking the less travelled path

Non-mainstream destinations need to be marketed to develop sustainable tourism, writes **Greg Lowe**



Vietnam's more remote Ha Giang province has just as much to offer as the country's more popular locations

Developing customised, immersive travel experiences remains a relatively niche segment in Vietnam's tourist industry that remains focused on mass-market group tours. Nevertheless, companies personalising trips to the country say doing so is not only more profitable, it is essential to building a more sustainable industry.

While itineraries covering key sites in the country continue to be the mainstream, those seeking to create memorable experiences for visitors are starting to send clients to less-travelled places like the Central Highlands, Sapa, Ha Giang and Cao Bang, as well as incorporating visits to ethnic communities, food tours and homestays.

"Customised travel has been around in Vietnam for quite a while and is continuing to develop," said Andy Carroll, global head of sales and marketing, Exotic Voyages.

"However, the number of Vietnamese travellers who go on tailor-made trips is still very small. We would love to see more Vietnamese travellers choosing customised and private tours instead of group tours as this would definitely help develop

sustainable tourism in the future."

According to the Vietnam National Tourism Administration, international arrivals dropped 12.3 per cent in 1H2015, in part due to the collapse of the Russian market.

Do Nguyen Phuong, director of Tourism Culture People which is behind Slow Travel Hue, urges tour operators to sell the country differently instead of as a single package.

"One way would be to split the country in two, with tourists spending 10 days in the north or 10 days in the south. That way, they will have more time to explore each destination, experience more activities and contribute to the local economy."

Even popular destinations such as Hue, a former royal capital and UNESCO World Heritage Site, suffer from the industry's mass-market focus.

"Hue is a very interesting destination, but it is sold for one to two nights max," Do said. "Clients really only have one full day (in the city). They visit the citadel, the royal tombs and that's it. There are interesting things to do, but tour operators are reluctant to change or add another night."

Promoting newer destinations in more

remote parts of Vietnam, which offer a diverse array of cultural, nature and activity-based experiences, is far more challenging due to poor access, limited accommodation and infrastructure, said Thuy Tien, managing director of Asia Trails Vietnam.

"For example, Ha Giang in the far north is remarkable, has wonderful scenery and local culture," Thuy said. "The problem is you can only market it to clients who are prepared to accept an eight-hour drive to get there."

Poor access typically raises transport costs while accommodation and other facilities in such destinations tend to fall short of client expectations.

While tailoring travel experiences is nothing new, companies that want to create unique itineraries for clients face a number of challenges like weak infrastructure and excessive red tape.

Jack Bartholomew, regional director Indochina, Khiri Travel, agrees that DMCs need to develop more of their own immersive tours and experiential products.

"There are plenty of interesting places to visit, but you face constant challenges such as ensuring the product is sustainable, that it's properly set up and that you

VIEWPOINTS

What is the Vietnam National Tourism Administration (VNAT) doing to support customised travel in the country?



Do Nguyen Phuong, director, Slow Travel Hue

VNAT should encourage tour operators to stop selling jam-packed itineraries

and to promote Vietnam as a place that has a variety of experiences. It is healthier (for the industry) and will encourage travellers to come back.

Andy Carroll, global head of sales and marketing, Exotic Voyages



VNAT is very supportive in helping travel companies which provide customised trips as they know how important the private sector is to this market. But I think Vietnam has to be portrayed as a diverse destination. When people around the world know that Vietnam has a bit of everything, from beaches and mountains to old towns and cities, they will be more likely to purchase customised trips.

have all the right documents, licenses and approvals."

Although Khiri has been developing new products in the Central Highlands, Bartholomew said the key issue is to create a better overall experience in Vietnam.

"At the end of the day, if you want people to come back, then you need immersive experiences that people find personally gratifying," he concluded.

WHAT'S NEW



From left: Hill-tribe village in the Central Highlands; Rice & Rural Life cycling tour with Slow Travel Hue

1 Sophie's Art Tour

Sophie Hughes drew on her experiences and knowledge as a gallery manager to develop this unique tour of Ho Chi Minh City's art scene.

The art tour provides insight into the worlds of art, popular culture and local history. It also takes clients through

private collections, museums and contemporary art spaces. Itineraries can be customised upon request.

2 Central Highlands Jarai Music tour

This three-day trip by Khiri Travel takes visitors to the hill-tribe villages of Kon Tum and Pleiku in the Central Highlands,

which borders southern Laos and north-eastern Cambodia.

Part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, travellers will visit places that played a role in the Vietnam War and soak in the local culture by visiting coffee plantations, eating with locals and visiting traditional Jarai stilt houses. The area is also home to

Phu Cuong waterfall and Bien Ho lake, the flooded crater of a volcano.

3 Rice & Rural Life tour

Slow Travel Hue's Rice & Rural Life cycling tour to Thanh Toan village – which dates back to the 17th century – offers visitors an insight into the role rice plays in Vietnam's culture.

Groups rub shoulders with villagers as they spend a day experiencing the local culture by working as a farmer, rowing a sampan and walking through local fields.

4 Triip.me

This Vietnamese tech start-up connects locals who are passionate about their towns and cities with travellers passing through; it also has B2B services. These locals provide insights into their hometown and tours range from visiting local markets or going on a night tour of Ho Chi Minh City.



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Front row: San Francisco Travel Association's Antonette Eckert, NYC & Company's Makiko Matsuda Healy, Visit Florida's Shari Bailey and Brand USA Taiwan, Hong Kong & Southeast Asia's Reene Ho-Phang

Delivering Asia Communications Thailand's David Johnson, The Nai Harn Phuket's Frank Grassmann and Nuttakorn Jaikaew



Millennium Hotels and Resorts Singapore's Bhupesh Yadav and team await buyers at their booth



TTG Asia

Take a closer look at all the show's happenings in this four-page spread photographed by *TTG Asia Daily's* lensmen, Eugene Tang and Richard Lai

pictorial special



Philippine Department of Tourism Singapore's Charles Leong, Tourism Promotions Board Philippines' Pauline Lazaro, Philippine Airlines Singapore's Morena Arneht Trespeses, Philippine Airlines' Pinky Custodio, Philippine Department of Tourism Singapore's Charmaine Yeong and Ang's Tour Philippines' Antonio Ang



Furama Hotels International Singapore's Shirlena Tan, Welly Jamin and team in high spirits



Above: Ministry of Tourism, Republic of Indonesia's Rizki Handayani and team are delighted to be at the show

Right: Langkawi Lagoon Resort Malaysia's Khairul Azda Abu Bakar, Langkawi Development Authority Malaysia's Azlina Ahmad Zubair and Mohd Tarmizi bin Mohamad Tajuddin



TTG Asia pictorial special



Tiger Mountain Nepal's Marcus Cotton addressing delegates



AirPlus International Singapore's Amelie Marivain, Social Innovation Park Singapore's Yang Xinyi and Maximus Tan



Dorsett Hospitality International Malaysia's Cheng Siew Yee and Kattie Hoo



Panorama Tours Indonesia's Royanto Handaya, Shine Hospitality & Marketing Singapore's Sharon Foo, Singa Group of Companies Singapore's Sherrine Tan and Adventure Travel Trade Association USA's Shannon Stowell



Tauzia Indonesia's Yosua Tanuwiria and Poppe Reisen GmbH & Co. Germany's Jasmin Schenk



Xotelia France's Jeffrey Messud and Good Life Myanmar Travels & Tours' Kaung Myat Oo



World Luxury Tourism Singapore's Manashree Prakash, Sabah Tourism Board's Noredah Othman and Jamili Nais



Left: Mira Moon Hong Kong's Frank Foster, TTG Asia Media's Darren Ng and veteran industry player Wong Soon Hwa. Above from left: Air Astana Singapore's Jay and Selina Lim; Tempting Places France's Sihem Jacques and Laurence Onfroy; MG Destinations Indonesia's Fernando Sutanto and Riyo Hospitality Indonesia's Riyo Wisaksono. Below: Rate Gain India's Ankur Yadav and Nilesh Maini



TTG workshop, happy hours and other events



Myanma Pearl Travel & Tours Myanmar's Daw Lei Lei Myint, Amiel Israel's Arie Abend and Amazing Adventure Myanmar Travel & Tours' Khin San Aye



Scubaspa Maldives' Martin Stoppa and Julia Sidko, and Dusit Thani Maldives' Riffa-Ath Saeed



Microtel by Wyndham Philippines' Faye Marie Deloso and Ramada Phuket Deevana's Thasupakorn Rokrunroj



Skyscanner UK's Paul Cumins, Conxxe UK's Ian Coyle and Skyscanner Singapore's Yongjian Deng



Hangzhou Shangri-La Business International Travel Service's Su Hua



Lowcostbeds Switzerland's Roy Stratford, Low Cost Travel Group Spain's Alex Gisbert and Lowcostbeds Thailand's Ralf Zimmer



Calamander Unawatuna Beach Sri Lanka's Sampath Senevirathne



Alibaba Group China's Tony Duan, Tuniu.com China's Donald Yu, Singapore Tourism Board's Lionel Yeo, Dianping.com China's Dylan Tang and Baidu China's Anson Ling



International Enterprise Singapore's Lee Ying Ying, BeMyGuest Singapore's Clement Wong and International Enterprise Singapore's Teo Cheng Yoke



Alibaba Group China's Renee Zhang and Baidu China's Fannie and Nancy Wong

TTG Asia pictorial special

A travel state of mind



Oriental Travels India's Ashmita Goel, Rediscover India's Hilal Kolu, Palomino Hospitality India's Pushpinder Singh, Noble House Tours India's Padam Shresth, India Tourism Singapore's R K Suman, Aayan Journeys India's R.Kumara Guru, Heat Travels & Tours (India)'s Deepak Gupta, Anantaram Holidays India's Manekk Bakshi and Oriental Travels India's Kanika Goel



Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business' Vicky Bowman and Myanmar Tourism Federation's Nicole Haeusler



Singapore Tourism Board's Tan Siew Ming and Michelle Chan, SATS-Creuers Cruise Services Singapore's Bob Chi



National Association of Travel Agents Singapore and G C Nanda & Sons Singapore's Mr & Mrs Devinder Ohri



Singapore Exhibition Services' Lindy Wee and Asia Academy for Retailing Singapore's K H Wong



Singapore Tourism Board's Edward Koh and G B Srithar, Sentosa Leisure Management Singapore's Steven Chung and Society of Tourist Guides (Singapore)'s Howard Lim



Resorts World Sentosa Singapore's Kelly Chan and team warmly welcoming buyers to their booth



City Tours Singapore's Wendy Leong and Sentosa Development Corporation Singapore's Susan Ang



Ma Feng Wo China's Xing Xing and LV Gang



Ace:Daytons Direct Singapore's Nancy Tan and The Traveller DMC Singapore's Yvonne Low



Singapore Tourism Board's Poh Chi Chuan, Centre for Liveable Cities Singapore's Khoo Teng Chye, Adeline Lim and Cheong Kay Teck



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Accessible via air from Manila



More Things to Do:

- Commune with nature at the Malasag Eco-tourism Village and Gardens.
- Take in the local culture in the Museum of Three Cultures and Museo de Oro.
- Hit the green at the 18-hole Pueblo de Oro Golf Course.
- Sample the fresh local products. Bukidnon pineapples are among the best in the world.
- Shop for souvenirs and bargains at the Night Market in Divisoria.
- Treat yourself to a box of sweet pastels (cream-filled buns), a local favorite.





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TTG
A S I A



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SOAK UP THE EXCITEMENT, BE WHERE THE ACTION IS

Find and attend outdoor parades, concerts and sports games all year round

Las Vegas has been called the Entertainment Capital of the World and there are multiple permanent performances by world-acclaimed **Cirque du Soleil**.

Visitors can now pick from eight exhilarating performances under the big top. Each one is independently unique and all are incredible to watch.

Among the eight, the top three fan favorites are *O*, *Michael Jackson ONE* and *Mystère*.

O offers audiences an aquatic experience as most of the performance takes place in a water stage.

With high-flying acrobats and awe-inspiring stunts taking place around and above water, the intimacy of the theater provides the audience with a magical up-close feel.

Michael Jackson ONE will not only appeal to his biggest fans, all music lovers will have a fabulous time.

It is a high-energy, electrifying performance packed with wild tricks that revolve around the King of Pop.

Mystère was the first Cirque du Soleil production to open in Las Vegas and it has remained a firm favorite among many fans.

This whimsically imagined production provokes laughter, amazement and wonder and it is not surprising that members of the audience are astounded and feel lighthearted after the final bow.

As a performer, **Celine Dion** has redefined an entire show genre. With no other performers on stage, she carries the show by herself, taking up the mantle of Elvis Presley.

Celine Dion's residency show includes her repertoire of hits and a collection of songs from other artists, including Billy Joel and Ella Fitzgerald.

Other special guests brought in via hologram add a wow factor to her performance.

The Grammy Award-winning artist performs with 31 musicians including a

five-piece horn section and a 16-piece string orchestra, all complemented by incredible lighting effects.

It is said the lighting and video effects when she sings *My Heart Will Go On* from the Oscar-winning movie *Titanic* is so stunning it has wowed even those who are not big fans.

Apart from Celine Dion, another major star creating Las Vegas headlines is pop diva **Britney Spears** and her Las Vegas show **Britney: Piece of ME** playing at **Planet Hollywood**.

The repertoire includes all her infectious dance songs as well as tracks from her latest album.

Her performance has been described as intense, electrifying, dreamlike and daring as the star is flying across the stage, singing in a ring of fire and

dancing in front of multiple mirrors inside the state-of-the-art **The Axis** theatre, creating a pulsating Las Vegas concert experience.

For something less intense and for those who love parades, **New York City's Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade** in November reigns supreme among all the big parades everyone can enjoy.

It has been a tradition since 1924 and the celebration gets bigger with more live performances and larger floats and inflatable balloon characters each year.

The parade features more than 10 marching bands, 30 parade floats, 1,500 dancers and cheerleaders and nearly 1,000 clowns.

The spectacle draws more than 2.5 million spectators to the 2.5-mile route, which begins at 77th Street and Central



Some Key Facts

- **Alamo Rent a Car** is the third-largest car rental company in the U.S.
- Based in Clayton, Missouri, Alamo is the largest car rental company catering to international travelers visiting North America.
- It developed the industry's first and only online check-in system.
- In the U.S., there are more than 171 self-service kiosks at 63 locations.
- Alamo started in 1974 with several locations in the Florida
- and introduced the unlimited mileage program, where customers can travel any distance with the car at no extra charge.
- Its fleet in the U.S. comprises mostly General Motors, Toyota, Nissan, and Volvo cars.
- Alamo serves as the official rental car of Walt Disney World Resort and Disneyland Resort.
- In the Americas, Alamo is also present in Canada, Mexico, Central and South America.



Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, New York City

Park West and ends at Macy's flagship store in Herald Square at 34th Street and 6th Avenue.

Following Thanksgiving, visitors can soak in the spirit and tradition of **Christmas at the Rockefeller Center Tree Lighting**.

Hundreds brave the cold temperatures and try to get as close as possible to the giant evergreen, dressed with more than 25,000 lights, at the annual event held in early-December.

The ceremony, televised live since 1966, features musical performances.

The first tree at Rockefeller Center, located west of Fifth Avenue from 47th Street to 51st Street, was placed in 1931.

The tallest tree to date was the one lit up in 1948. It was a 100-foot-tall Norway spruce from Connecticut.

Those visiting New York City over the New Year holiday can catch **Global Welcome Ambassador Taylor Swift** who will headline **Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve**, a beloved Times Square New Year's Eve celebration and tradition.

For those bitten by the running bug the **New York Marathon** is an exciting event to attend.

The New York Marathon has grown from a Central Park race with 55 finishers to the world's biggest and most popular marathon, which counted a total of 50,530 finishers in 2014.

Sunday, November 1 is the date of the 2015 event.

To enjoy some true blue Americana, **Philadelphia's annual Wawa Welcome America** is a series

of celebrations leading up to the Fourth of July, and starts 10 days prior.

The Wawa Welcome America, which commemorates America's independence, ends with the largest free outdoor concert along the Ben Franklin Parkway.

Also taking place along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway is **Made in America**, a two-day music festival produced by the hip-hop artist and entrepreneur Jay Z that takes place every year over the Labor Day weekend in September.

Other events to look out for in summer in Philadelphia include The

Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts, which takes place in June.

Fans who enjoy American sports and who support sports teams playing for Philadelphia can watch the **Philadelphia 76ers** (basketball), **Philadelphia Phillies** (baseball), **Philadelphia Eagles** (football) and the **Philadelphia Flyers** (hockey).

As for those with a need for speed, **Florida's Daytona 500**, a 500-mile NASCAR (National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) race is the place to be.

This event is held annually in February and takes place at the Daytona International Speedway.

If star gazing is what you enjoy and you are a big fan of Hollywood, fashion and pop culture, then **Los Angeles** has numerous opportunities for fans to indulge in their passion.

January marks the start of the entertainment industry's awards season kicking off with the **Golden Globe Awards**, followed by the **Grammy Awards**, **Academy Awards**, **Emmy Awards** and more.

Another good time to be in LA is for the Fourth of July Fireworks Spectacular at the Hollywood Bowl.

It is one of Southern California's most popular summer traditions and features legendary music acts and incredible fireworks displays in a gorgeous outdoor setting.





The U.S. Capitol, Washington D.C.

HISTORY

CELEBRATING U.S. HISTORY

The major holidays show off the interesting culture and vibrant heritage of Americans

More cities in the U.S. and Asia have direct air connectivity



Some Key Facts

- **United Airlines** and its partner airlines offer flights from the U.S. to a large number of airports throughout Asia in China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan and Vietnam.
- In the U.S., United flies from Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Houston, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, New York/Newark, Raleigh/Durham, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington D.C. to the Asian cities of Beijing, Chengdu, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Taipei, Tokyo, and Singapore.
- In Asia, **Korean Air** operates flights to 11 points in the U.S.
- In May 2014, Houston became Korean Air's 11th U.S. destination and its second in Texas.
- The airline's other U.S. destinations are Atlanta, Chicago O'Hare, Dallas/Fort Worth, Honolulu, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, New York JFK, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington Dulles.

Among the big holidays in the U.S., where virtually all companies observe and close are **New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving** and **Christmas**.

According to a survey, the majority of Americans say Christmas is even more important than the Fourth of July and nearly nine out of 10 Americans celebrate Christmas.

In 2011, a *Time* magazine article picked a number of big cities for being among the most "Christmassy" in the U.S.

They were Los Angeles, with its Los Posadas processions, New York City, with its many winter wonderland

attractions that draw an even more tourists, and Washington D.C., where U.S. Presidents have hosted the lighting of America's tree since 1923.

Still, **July 4** is important to many Americans because on that day in 1776, members of the Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, adopted the final draft of the Declaration of Independence.

The Fourth of July celebrations in historic cities like Boston and Philadelphia draw huge crowds to their festivities.

In Boston, the *USS John F. Kennedy* often sails into the harbor, while the Boston Pops Orchestra holds a televised concert on the banks of the Charles River, featuring American music and ending with the 1812 Overture.

Meanwhile, the **Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum** in Washington D.C.

and the **Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center** in Chantilly, Virginia, offer aviation history buffs an insight into a rich and colorful past.

The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum and the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center offer aviation history buffs an insight into a rich and colorful past



Antelope Island, Utah



Crater Lake, Oregon



Canyonlands National Park, Utah

HONORING THE PARK SERVICE

New IMAX film to mark 100th anniversary

Next year marks the centenary of the establishment of the **National Park Service**.

On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the act creating the National Park Service, a new federal bureau in the Department of the Interior responsible for protecting the 35 national parks and monuments then managed by the department and those yet to be established.

In celebration of the milestone, Brand USA is producing a major big screen IMAX film.

Details about it will be featured at VisitTheUSA.com.

Shooting of the IMAX film began in May 2014 and the new film will allow fans of the natural world to preview a plethora of U.S. national parks from a cinema seat.

The film is being shot by MacGillivray Freeman Films, whose work includes movies exploring the Grand Canyon and the South Pacific.

The team has spent one year in pre-production, researching the 59 national

parks in the U.S., where there are 400 park sites in all.

They include protected areas and national monuments.

Filming of the majority of the footage took place last autumn for viewers to really see a change in the parks in fall when there is a lot of color and movement.

To cover all the national parks in a film would be impossible but the filmmakers hope to provide a sense of range for viewers.

While the parks have so much to offer, the filmmakers want to capture some of the lesser-known with incredible footage.

Many of the parks have dark-sky programs that allow people to escape city light ambience, for example, and that is one aspect that will be featured in the IMAX film, which will showcase popular locations such as **Crater Lake in Oregon**, the **Utah Canyonlands** and **Bryce Canyon**, which is also in **Utah**.

The film will take viewers from those types of landscape through to places like **Glacier National Park**, where the

Take a helicopter from Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon



Some Key Facts

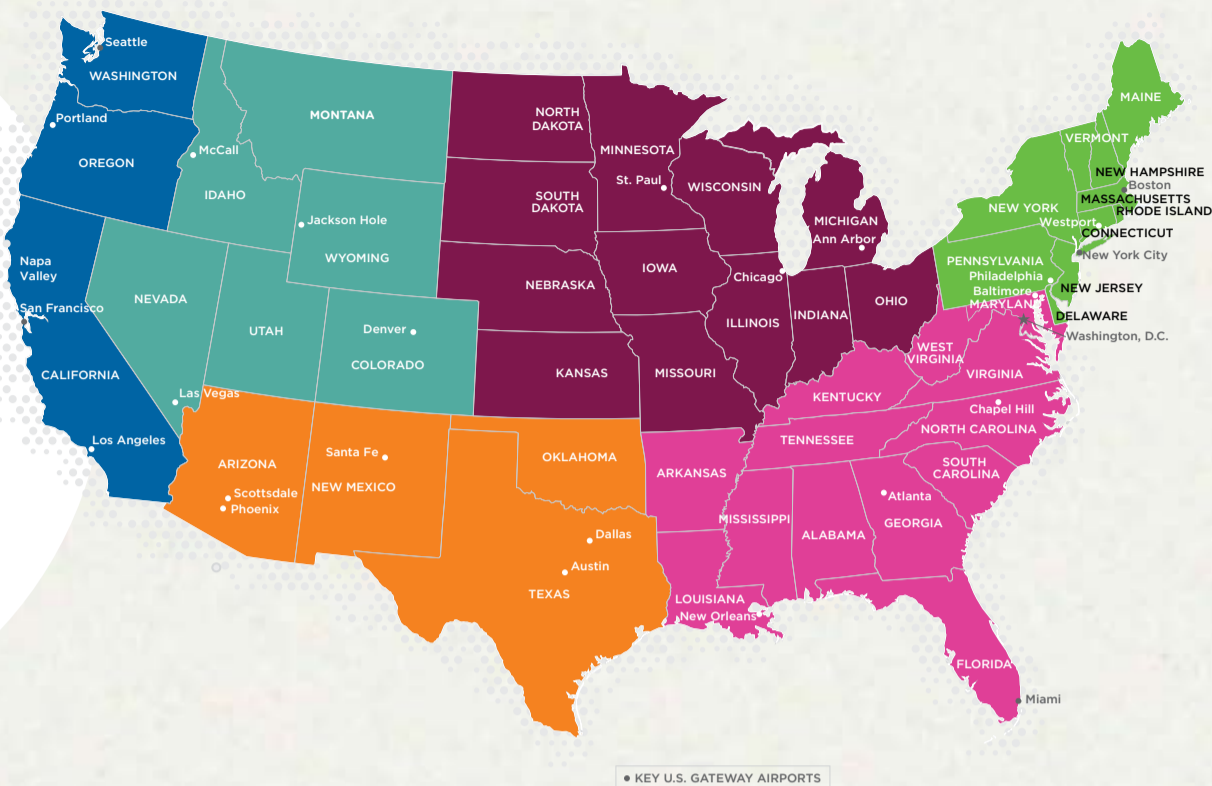
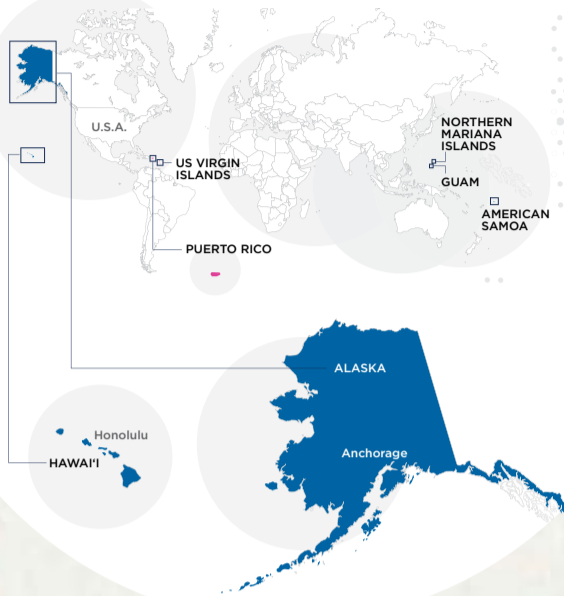
- **Maverick Aviation Group** was founded in Las Vegas in December 1995 with the launch of Maverick Helicopters®.
- In addition to the helicopter operations, Maverick Airlines was formed in 2008. It now, operates six fixed-winged aircraft to the Grand Canyon and is available for charter flights.
- In 2009, Mustang Helicopters was launched to provide flights departing from the Henderson Executive Airport to the Grand Canyon.
- The ECO-Star (EC-130) made by Airbus Helicopters is the safest and most comfortable tourism-based helicopter
- and the company has the largest fleet of ECO-Star helicopters in the world.
- Formed in 1965, **Papillon Helicopters** is the world's oldest and largest sightseeing company flying an estimated 600,000 passengers a year.
- its daily tours to the Grand Canyon include more than 40 unique excursions that feature the spectacular sights of the Hoover Dam, Lake Mead, Monument Valley, Lake Powell, and unforgettable views of the Grand Canyon.
- All Papillon's excursions offer pre-recorded narratives in 11 languages, 12 including English.

range of topography is impressive.

The filmmakers will also be capturing **Yellowstone National Park**, **Yosemite National Park**, the **Everglades** plus many others.

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NON CONTINENTAL STATES AND TERRITORIES



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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.

What may I bring in duty-free?

- No more than 200 cigarettes and 100 cigars per individual 18 and older
- 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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