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Europe holds up

Buyers and sellers observe generally encouraging trend

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena and Mimi Hudoyo

DESPITE the uncertain global economy, business from Europe into Asia is still on an upward trajectory, with buyers and sellers reporting growth in FITs and small groups.

Pham Ha, founder & CEO, Luxury Travel Vietnam, said: "Our UK market is doing well for the FIT, small group and special interest segments, posting a 30 per cent increase from 2011 to 2012. The robust growth from the UK is also partly driven by the launch of Vietnam Airlines' thrice-weekly flights from Gatwick to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in December 2011. At the same time, our German business rose 25 per cent from 2011 to 2012, led by FITs, couples and multi-generational family segments."

Carlo Fossati, MICE manager, Periplo Viaggi Italy, added: "Our business to South-east Asia is going strong, especially for Vietnam and Myanmar, as we notice that Italians are starting to move away

from established destinations such as Thailand and Bali.

"Growth to Asia was stagnant in 2011, but picked up in 2012 with a 15 per cent rise. This year, I expect the trend to continue, probably about 10 per cent growth."



Ramayana: not too optimistic

Volume from non-traditional markets is also climbing. Kauno Piligrimas Lithuania director, Juozas Pekis, anticipates five to 10 per cent growth for 2013. "We still see growth to Thailand, and we plan to expand and combine it with Cambodia and Laos this year," he said, adding that his market comprises mostly FITs.

Heldur Allese, chairman, Fiesta Reised Travel Agency Estonia, said: "We are still seeing strong demand for this region, with a 15 per cent increase in business from 2011 to 2012, although we

expect slightly lesser growth this year. Thailand and Bali remain the top destinations in South-east Asia for Estonians, who are generally fond of spa, wellness and golf."

However, not all inbound operators had good news to share, one of them being Panorama Destination Indonesia, whose bulk of European traffic consists of group series from the Netherlands and Eastern Europe.

"The European market does not seem to be picking up this year," said managing director, Raka Ramayana.

Pham also spotted some worrying signs.

He said: "Probably due to European travellers exercising more caution in spending, we observed that the booking time has shortened from a year to just six or three months ahead, with even some last-minute bookings. European FITs are also cutting back on their time in Vietnam from two weeks to 10 days, while opting to stay in less expensive properties."

Swiss experts help to develop Flores

A COLLABORATION between the Swiss Secretariat of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of Indonesia has been formed to develop the eastern part of Indonesia's Flores, with special attention given to the Maumere-Larantuka-Solor Island route.

The initiative comes under the supervision of Swisscontact, the Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation.

Swisscontact project manager, Ruedi Nuetzi, said: "Normally, travellers take the Maumere-Kelimutu-Labuan Bajo (Komodo) route, while lately there are travellers taking the Ende-Kelimutu-Labuan Bajo route. The eastern part, however, is a bit off (the beaten track)."

He added that Swisscontact had assisted communities in Flores to set up local tourism management organisations (TMO), develop products and prepare for them for promotion.

Larantuka has the Reinha Rosari Cathedral, where pilgrims from all over the world gather for Easter, as well as traditional houses in Ile Padang, snorkelling

and a hot spring. Sikka, whose capital is Maumere, is known for its *ikat* that still uses traditional, handspun cotton yarn made from natural dyes, while Solor offers nature and culture.

"We will invite the media to try the route and create awareness of the destination," Nuetzi



Women making ikat in Sikka

said, adding that this would be followed by invitations to tour operators to seek their inputs on whether these programmes would be suitable for groups, FITs or other special interest travellers.

"Our target is to have East Flores as a separate (package) from the West, as it will (take) too long to cover the whole island," he said. "We have seen demand for Komodo grow significantly (in

the last two years), and we need to (encourage) travellers to go beyond Komodo and give them reasons to stay longer in Flores."

Flores Destination Management Organisation (DMO), a body comprising regional stakeholders and government representatives from the eight districts in Flores, will soon start trialling the East Flores route. It will act as a bridge between local TMOs and tour operators through its Bali office.

Floressa Bali Tours area manager, Heribertus Ajo, said he had already been packaging East Flores, featuring trekking and bird watching tours to attract year-round traffic. "The real issue with Flores is actually accessibility," he added.

Most travellers to Flores arrive via Bali, but the new airport in Lombok is also being seen as a possible international gateway in the future. As part of the central government's infrastructure development plans, Labuan Bajo's and Ende's airport terminals are also being expanded, while Maumere's runway is being extended. — Mimi Hudoyo

Russia roars into Asia

By Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

THE positive impact from the Russian market is spilling over beyond Thailand and into other South-east Asian countries.

"Russia is now one of the fastest growing source markets for Vietnam. Last year, we recorded a dramatic growth of about 70 per cent," said Tran Phu Cuong, deputy director general, international cooperation department, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism at the ASEAN NTOs + Russia meeting.

Tith Chantha, director general, Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, noted a similar trend. He said: "Last year, Cambodia welcomed 100,000 Russian tourists, marking a 50 per cent increase from the year before. For 2013, we are targeting 30-40 per cent growth."

Head of Russia's Federal Agency for Tourism, Alexander Radkov, said that more than one million Russians visited South-

east Asia last year, with Thailand being the top destination, and Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore becoming increasingly popular too.

However, ASEAN NTOs told the *Daily* that a key challenge was still the lack of Russian-speaking guides, an issue that is being addressed.



Tith Chantha: high hopes

Said Yuri Kopylov, vice-rector of Russian State University for Tourism & Service: "We will widen the format of language courses to include language

immersion courses in Russia; previously it was just an e-learning programme for tour operators on the Internet followed by a one-month course in Jakarta. We are also in discussion with PATA to foster closer links for exchange programmes and internships between Russia and ASEAN."

Radkov added: "We still have to remove barriers such as visa formalities and improve security for Russian tourists in South-east Asia."

Silver market shines on

By S Puvaneswary

ECONOMIC uncertainty in Europe has inflicted nary a dent in the silver market niche, with longhaul agents reporting year-on-year growth and expecting further increases this year.

This segment comprises elderly couples who travel without their children. According to travel consultants, senior travellers' visits to Asia are motivated by desires for cultural and heritage immersions, and destinations in the Mekong region are popular.

Prime Holidays Bulgaria general manager, Antoaneta Petrova, said: "The senior market saw a 25 per cent year-on-year growth in 2012, and this year we anticipate a further increment of 30 per cent because we are now working with more retail agents in Bulgaria. The seniors here love to travel and many make it a point to take an annual trip. An average trip runs for 10 days."

Travelpine.com Belgium saw a 30 per cent year-on-year growth in the segment, which included group series and private tours. The agency's product manager Asia, David Van Driessche, said full-board tours combining cultural and heritage sights with beaches were most popular

among clients who chose to go with group series.

"This segment, usually in their 50s and 60s, have money to spend and typically stay in four- and five-star hotels. Many are also repeat travellers," he noted.

Sweden's Kina Resor chairman of the board business development, Per Camenius, expects Finnair's new thrice-weekly Helsinki-Hanoi flights, to be launched in mid-June, to generate interest in Vietnam among its senior travellers. The agency's series tours to Myanmar, launched in February 2012, have seen good demand, with 17 groups handled to date.

Some travel consultants also observed support from hotel partners in tapping this segment.

Petrova said hotels had been willing to grant discounts to elderly travellers "as they are usually quiet and do not make a mess in the room".

Noor M Ismail, director, business development at Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel Malaysia, who has also seen a 10 per cent year-on-year growth in the senior market from Canada, said hoteliers would offer special rates and add-ons for long-stay seniors during low season.

The road ahead for German travel sector

Get a quick grasp of the health of Germany's travel market through these meaningful figures compiled by **Murray Bailey**

German arrivals to Asia register improvement

Outbound travel from Germany to Asia-Pacific (excluding China) appeared to have underperformed in three of five major destinations in 2012, according to latest data from Travel Business Analyst. However, this is still an improvement from 2011 when German arrivals posted weaker growth compared to the total figure in all five destinations (see table).

In Australia, Hong Kong and Thailand, growth in German arrivals paled in comparison with the destinations' overall visitor growth rates. But in Japan, growth from Germany hit 37 per cent, versus 36

German arrivals in five major destinations of Asia-Pacific (excluding China)

| Destination | 2012 | | | 2011 | | |
|-------------|-------------|----------|-----------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| | No., x1,000 | % Growth | % Growth* | No., x1,000 | % Growth | % Growth* |
| Australia | 147 | -4.3 | 0.5 | 154 | -3.9 | -0.2 |
| Hong Kong | 226 | 1.1 | 16.3 | 224 | -3 | 16.4 |
| Japan | 102 | 36.7 | 36 | 74 | -36.5 | -27.8 |
| Singapore | 273 | 24 | 11.4 | 220 | 5.1 | 13.1 |
| Thailand+ | 664 | 10.1 | 13.6 | 603 | -0.6 | 20.7 |

Notes: All 2012 data are estimates by Travel Business Analyst (TBA) based on latest available data. *Total arrivals for the destination. +By passport tracks. Source: relevant DMOs, TBA

per cent for all arrivals. In Singapore, the difference was even greater – Germany chalked up 24 per cent growth, compared with an overall 11 per cent.

Results from Thailand were probably the biggest surprise – arrivals from Germany climbed 10 per cent, after a one per cent dip in 2011.

664 ↑ x1,000, the number of German visitors to Thailand, the hottest destination in Asia for these travellers

37 ↑ % increase in German arrivals to Japan, surpassing the destination's total visitor growth rate of 36%

273 ↑ x1,000, the number of German footfalls in Singapore, up from 220,000 last year

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Robust visitor arrivals for Germany

Germany was headed for a visitor arrival growth of nearly eight per cent in 2012, rising further from the six per cent recorded in 2011, according to estimates by Travel Business Analyst, drawn from United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) data.

This would place Germany's performance above the four per cent growth rate estimated by UNWTO for global tourism, and higher than the three per cent growth predicted for both Europe and Western Europe.

Furthermore, Germany's inbound tourism also performed much better than its main competitors – France (+2 per cent), Italy (-2 per cent), Spain (+4 per cent) and the UK (-0.4 per cent).

Germany's robust growth in 2012 was probably enough for it to overtake the UK to become Europe's third largest, after Spain and Italy.

Total visitor count for Germany, based on UNWTO's year-to-date data, would have been 31 million in 2012, compared to 29 million in the UK.



Estimated % growth in visitor arrivals in Germany



Estimated % growth in visitor arrivals in Europe



In millions, the estimated number of total visitors for Germany, overtaking the UK's inbound numbers

Air traffic dips between APAC and Germany

The number of air passengers between Germany and Asia-Pacific had fallen 2.6 per cent during the January-October 2012 period, while there was a three per cent growth for the total Germany market.

A number of surprises have turned up in the data (see table). Traffic dipped in China and India, two leading sectors generally considered to be fast-growing markets. China, the largest, fell 8.8 per cent, and India slipped 10.5 per cent, losing its

Air passengers on routes between Germany and Asia-Pacific, x1,000

| | 2012 | % Growth | % AAGR | 2011 | % Growth |
|---------------|---------|----------|--------|---------|----------|
| Australia | 89 | -15.9 | 0.5 | 106 | 3.2 |
| China | 1,827 | -8.8 | 10.3 | 2,004 | 22.6 |
| Hong Kong | 622 | 1 | 1.5 | 616 | -0.9 |
| India | 1,241 | -10.5 | 6.5 | 1,387 | -3.3 |
| Indonesia | 25 | -61.7 | -12.9 | 64 | 95.3 |
| Japan | 1,386 | 16.9 | 2.4 | 1,186 | 4 |
| Korea | 661 | 5.8 | 5.7 | 625 | 7 |
| Malaysia | 130 | -11 | -1.4 | 146 | 3.6 |
| Singapore | 944 | 17.5 | 3.4 | 803 | 0.2 |
| Taiwan | 119 | -4 | 9.2 | 124 | 12.2 |
| Thailand | 924 | -17.7 | 0.5 | 1,123 | -1.1 |
| Vietnam | 219 | 0.7 | NA | 217 | 16.5 |
| Asia-Pacific+ | 8,186 | -2.6 | 4.3 | 8,401 | 6 |
| Total | 155,875 | 3.1 | 4.4 | 151,192 | 6.5 |

Notes: Full-year figures for 2011; 2012 figures based on growth over January-October. AAGR = annual average growth rate, 2000-2012. +Total of those listed here. Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, Travel Business Analyst.

second spot to Japan, which grew 16.9 per cent. Even in the tsunami year of 2011, Japan's growth was four per cent.

Thailand, a perennial favourite of German leisure travellers, used to be the fourth largest market in terms of traffic to and from Germany. However, Thailand lost its spot to Singapore in 2012, which grew 17.5 per cent, as the Kingdom declined by a shocking 17.7 per cent.

From the years 2000 to 2012, average annual growth has been unimpressive for the main markets besides China (+10.3 per cent), Taiwan (+9.2 per cent) and India (+7 per cent). Australia, for instance, grew less than a percentage point over the years. Dismal results were seen for Indonesia and Malaysia, which registered declining rates of 12.9 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively.



% fall in passengers on Germany-China routes to 1.8 million



% fall in Germany-India passengers to 1.2 million



% growth in traffic between Germany and Japan, pushing India to 3rd place

Mixed results for German carriers

Seat sales on Lufthansa's Asia-Pacific routes declined 13 per cent to 4.6 million in 2012, versus a growth of 7.2 per cent to 4.7 million in 2011. For the Lufthansa Group – which includes Austrian Airlines and SWISS services to Asia-Pacific – seat sales were flat at 6.2 million.

In comparison, Lufthansa's systemwide seat sales grew 2.4 per cent to 74.7 million, while overall group sales rose 2.4 per cent to 103.1 million.

Results for Lufthansa's subsidiaries varied: seat sales on Austrian Airlines grew 1.8 per cent to 11.5 million while SWISS gained three percentage points to 16.8 million. Lufthansa had sold the poor-performing British Midland to British+Iberia group (IAG), and has stopped publishing separate data for its no-frills carrier, Germanwings – a weak performer when results were last separated.

Air Berlin (AB), Germany's second largest airline group, fared less well. For 2012, systemwide seat sales for the hybrid operation of AB were down 6.8 per cent to 29.6 million, but seat sales on its Austria-based subsidiary Niki rose 6.3 per cent to 3.7 million. For the two airlines combined,



it was a 5.5 per cent dip to 33.3 million.

This is despite important commercial developments at AB. The airline, together with Niki, joined the Oneworld alliance

in March 2012. Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways raised its shareholding in the AB group to 29 per cent.

According to AB, the Etihad link pro-

duced 300,000 seat sales to both airlines in 2012, although the balance – how much AB to Etihad and vice-versa – was not announced.



% decrease on Lufthansa's seat sales on Asia-Pacific routes to 4.6 million



% fall in Air Berlin's systemwide seat sales in 2012



x1,000, the rise in Air Berlin's seat sales gained from Etihad's 29 per cent ownership



Festival Delights in Macau in 2013

Key Celebrations are 25th International Fireworks Display and 60th Macau Grand Prix

Millions of visitors from all over Asia and around the world are expected to visit Macau in 2013 as the "City of Events" continues to host exciting programmes and festivals.

In 2012, over 28 million visitors from China, Hong Kong, Chinese Taiwan, Thailand and Korea descended on the enclave.

This year, Macau's festive highlights will fall upon the 25th Macau International Fireworks Display Contest and the 60th Macau Grand Prix.

60th Macau Grand Prix

Since 1954, the Macau Grand Prix has featured many famous Formula 3 champions including Michael Schumacher, Ayrton Senna and David Coulthard and this year will celebrate its 60th anniversary.

The renowned street circuit continues to attract the top names in the racing world due to its tight bends, super-fast straights and après-race parties.

This year, the Macau Grand Prix committee has specially organised a two weekend Diamond Jubilee Grand Prix Carnival.

The programme is likely to attract the best of the region's motorsport to deliver a unique and diverse celebration for drivers, riders, media and fans from all over the world.

The first race weekend will be held on November 9-10, and the second from November 14-17, 2013.

Six races are scheduled to take place on November 9-10, including the MAC/HKG Interport Race and the Macau Touring Car Cup, popular with drivers across Macau, Hong Kong and Asia.

The three blue riband headline races – the Formula 3 Macau Grand Prix - the FIA Formula 3 Intercontinental Cup, the 47th Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix and the double header season finale of the FIA World Touring Car Championship will be held on November 14-17 as part of a seven-race weekend.

For enquiries or tickets reservation, please contact the Macau Grand Prix Committee at Tel: (853) 87962210 / 87962242, fax (853) 28727309, or email: macaughp@cgpm.gov.mo or visit www.macau.grandprix.gov.mo

25th Macau International Fireworks Display

2013 also marks the 25th anniversary of the Macau International Fireworks Display Contest that runs through the weekends from September to October, lighting up Macau nights with colourful displays and sound delights.

For the contest in 2012, teams from 10 countries and regions including Korea, Thailand, mainland China, France, the United States, Portugal, Australia, Italy, Chinese Taiwan and Macao had participated to compete for the crown



Art and Photography Contest

While enjoying the colourful sights, MGTO will also be hosting an art and photography contest at the same time. This competition, which is open to everyone, offers attractive cash prizes.

Tourists and locals are likely to be overwhelmed by the extravaganza during this joyous occasion.

2013 Macau Calendar of Events

| | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 24th Macau Arts Festival..... | May 3 - Jun 1 |
| 13th Macau Lotus Flower Festival | Jun |
| 2013 Macau International Dragon Boat Races..... | Jun 8,9,12 |
| FIVB Volleyball World Grand Prix Macau 2013..... | Aug |
| 25th Macau Intl Fireworks Display Contest..... | Sep 14, 19, 21, 28 & Oct 1 |
| 27th Macau International Music Festival..... | Oct 5 - Nov 3 |
| Macau International Kart Grand Prix..... | Oct |
| Macau Open Golf Tournament..... | Oct |
| Macau City Fringe Festival..... | Nov 9-24 |
| 60th Macau Grand Prix | Nov 9-10, 14-17 |
| Macau Food Festival..... | Nov |
| 2013 Macau International Marathon | Dec 1 |

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Still room for growth for German online travel market

Despite being Europe's largest travel market, Germany is second in terms of online travel bookings with 19 billion euros (US\$25.5 billion), lower than the UK's 24 billion euros, according to PhoCusWright's (PCW) European Online Travel Overview.

In terms of share in its own travel market, Germany is only fourth in Europe. In Germany, the online share of the total travel market is 35 per cent, in comparison with Scandinavia's 53 per cent (if counted as a single market), the UK's 52 per cent and France's 40 per cent.

PCW might have underestimated the German market potential last year by forecasting slower growth of eight per cent, compared with nine per cent for France and nine per cent for the UK. This year, PCW expects Germany and France to post growth of eight per cent, and projects a four per cent growth for the UK.

However, the company's projections do not quite match economic outlooks. Based on other sources, Germany's economy is predicted to grow around one per cent in 2013, not much better than the flat forecasts for France and the UK.

Scandinavia is not listed as a single market, but indications point to higher economic growth there this year compared to Germany.

If PCW's forecasts are correct, Germany's share of Europe's online travel market will remain the same at 21 per cent between 2011 and 2014, but the UK's will fall from 27 per cent to 25 per cent, Scandinavia unchanged at eight per cent and France up from 18 per cent to 19 per cent. Again, these are likely under-estimates for

Germany.

Comprising the largest share of Germany's online travel market is suppliers, whose share has fallen slightly – from 62 per cent to 60 per cent over the past three years and to 59 per cent in 2011. But this is partly because air travel represents a large share – 57 per cent of the supplier total in 2010 and 53 per cent in 2011.

In other markets, online shares in other segments such as hotels and travel packages are higher.

Full-service airlines' share of the German online market is unusually high (see pie charts). Last year, PCW had expected the share to rise to 39 per cent in 2013, but it now expects this to fall to 36 per cent in 2014.

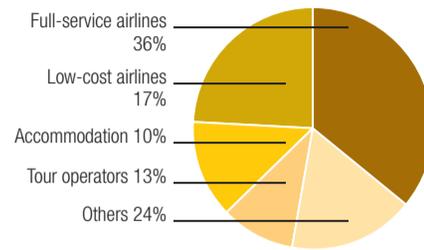
In 2012, PCW estimated that total sales of German tour operators in 2011 increased two per cent to 15 billion euros and forecasted a further 1.3 per cent growth in 2012. It put penetration (online as a share of total sales) at nine per cent in both 2011 and 2012.

PCW believes tour operators' sales will hit 16.7 billion euros by end of 2012 and forecasts three per cent growth to 17.2 billion euros this year. Penetration has grown slower than expected – PCW puts it at eight per cent in 2012 but expects nine per cent this year.

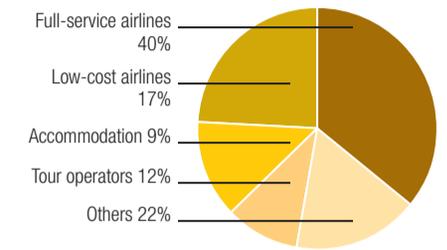
Germany's three leading tour operators are Rewe, Thomas Cook and TUI. PCW pegs Thomas Cook's online share (as a share of its total sales) higher than TUI's – 21 per cent versus 19 per cent – but provides no data for Rewe, whose share is believed to be much lower at around 10 per cent.

Online travel bookings in Germany, supplier share,

2014



2011



Source: PhoCusWright's European Online Travel Overview 2012. Note: Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding off

Online travel bookings in Germany, million of euros

| | 2013 [^] | % Growth | % Share | 2012 | % Growth | % Share |
|----------------|-------------------|----------|---------|--------|----------|---------|
| OTAs | 9,607 | 10 | 44.3 | 7,662 | 9.8 | 39.7 |
| Airlines | 6,519 | 6.4 | 30.1 | 6,564 | 7 | 34 |
| Full-service | 4,434 | 6.8 | 20.4 | 4,583 | 7.4 | 23.7 |
| Low-cost | 2,085 | 5.6 | 9.6 | 1,981 | 6 | 10.3 |
| Accommodation | 1,230 | 7.4 | 5.7 | 969 | 3.5 | 5 |
| Tour operators | 1,496 | 8.2 | 6.9 | 1,422 | 5.2 | 7.4 |
| Others | 2,836 | 5.7 | 13.1 | 2,133 | 1.8 | 11 |
| Total | 21,688 | 8.1 | 100 | 19,317 | 8 | 100 |

Source: PhoCusWright's European Online Travel Overview 2011[^] and 2012

OTAs are expected to grow their share of the market this year (see table). In 2012, PCW expected growth to had been 15 per cent for 2011, would be 10 per cent in 2012 and nine per cent in 2013. This year it forecasts a 10 per cent growth for 2013.

Last year PCW's ranking for OTAs for 2010 showed Priceline/Booking.com with a 15 per cent share of the market, Expedia

with 14 per cent, Unister 14 per cent, HRS nine per cent, Opodo eight per cent and Holiday Check seven per cent. This year, for 2011, the rankings show Priceline/Booking.com growing to a 17 per cent share, followed by Unister 14 per cent, HRS/Hotel.de 13 per cent, Expedia 11 per cent, Odigeo seven per cent and Holiday Check seven per cent.

Snapshots

Performance of German travel market

- The latest version of ITB World Trends Report – due to be updated during ITB Berlin – indicates slower outbound travel growth in 2012. Following a one per cent increase in 2011, Germany's growth was flat in 2012, compared with a growth of four per cent for global outbound trips and two per cent for Europe outbound.

- Based on the first 10 months of 2012, air passenger numbers on Germany-US routes rose 0.8 per cent to just under 10 million passengers, versus 0.04 per cent growth to 9.9 million in 2011, according to data from the US Department of Commerce and Travel Business Analyst.

- After a dismal 2011, share prices of Germany's leading quoted travel companies increased strongly in 2012 (see table). All except London-quoted TUI Travel are still down on their end-2010 prices.

Thomas Cook was top performer, up 225 per cent, but it is still only 25 per cent of its end-2010 price. Fraport, which owns and operates Frankfurt airport and others in Germany and beyond, had the slowest growth. In 2011, Fraport's 19 per cent fall was the least of all the stocks shown.

It is encouraging to note that the growth in stocks was greater than growth in the companies' respective stockmarkets – except for Fraport.

Stock prices of travel companies in Germany

| Company | 2012 | % Growth | 2011 | % Growth | 2010 |
|--------------------------|-------|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| Lufthansa | 14.2 | 55 | 9.2 | -43.8 | 16.4 |
| Fraport | 43.9 | 15.6 | 38 | -19.4 | 47.2 |
| Thomas Cook* | 48 | 225.4 | 14.8 | -92.2 | 190 |
| TUI | 7.9 | 63.6 | 4.8 | -54.3 | 10.5 |
| TUI Travel* | 283 | 70.4 | 166 | -32.7 | 246 |
| Stockmarket index | | | | | |
| Frankfurt-Xetra Dax | 7,612 | 29.1 | 5,898 | -14.7 | 6,914 |
| London FTSE 100 | 5,898 | 5.8 | 5,572 | -5.6 | 5,900 |

Notes: End of year, in local currency. *Quoted in London. Source: Travel Business Analyst, relevant stockmarkets



BRUNEI Natural beauties and shopping lures aplenty

Lovely flutters

Taman Kulimambang, a butterfly park, opened in July 2012. Located within Tasek Merimbun Heritage Park in the Tutong district, the attraction is managed by the Museums Department and houses around 100 butterflies of different species. Tasek Merimbun is open daily though opening hours differ according to the day of the week. Admission is free.

Underwater treasures

The waters off the coast of Brunei are a diver's paradise. Shallow coral dives are perfect for inexperienced divers, while experienced divers can explore Brunei's reefs and more impressively, its pristine



Royal Brunei Airlines

wrecks scattered between Brunei and the Malaysian island of Labuan. Royal Brunei Holidays offers diving packages, which include up to nine boat dives with trained guides. Each diver is provided with 12kg of free excess baggage.

Step back in time

Opened in August 2009, the Kampong Ayer Cultural & Tourism Gallery gives visitors a unique glimpse into the history of Kampong Ayer, the world's largest settlement on stilts, which has been in existence for over a thousand years. The gallery is shaped like a traditional village house and sits over water in Kampong Ayer. Artefacts on display date back to the 10th century and are on loan from the Brunei Museum.



Kampong Ayer Cultural & Tourism Gallery

LAOS

Good for nature lovers and event planners

Kao Rao Cave is a tourist draw



Explore a cave

Situated in Luang Namtha province, Kao Rao Cave opened in January 2012 after a US\$100,000 injection from the government. The cave contains one of the longest unmapped labyrinths in the country's

The Waterfront

Opened in May 2011, The Waterfront in Bandar Seri Begawan is a pedestrian promenade great for strolls in the evening or to watch the world go by over an iced drink.

Newest stay

The 112-room Times Hotel Brunei is one

of the newest hotels in Brunei. It fully opened in March 2011, occupying the second to sixth floors of Times Square Shopping Centre. Facilities include a spa, a gym and an outdoor swimming pool. The hotel is a five-minute drive from Brunei International Airport and ten minutes from the Gadong and Kiulap commercial areas.

Retail heaven

Opened in July 2011, Airport Mall is Brunei's latest shopping destination. The four-storey building on Jalan Berakas sits next to Times Square Shopping and Entertainment Complex. It is home to 174 retail shops, a 22-lane bowling alley and a basement carpark with 285 parking spaces.

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north-east and, so far, has been extremely successful in attracting tourists to the area. Local legend has it that a bathtub-shaped stalactite located in the cave was once the bathing place of the mythological naga serpent.

Learn all there is about rice

The Living Land Organic Farm just outside of Luang Prabang has put together a hands-on activity which takes visitors through the steps involved in the planting and harvesting of rice, an

important staple for the Lao people. In this programme, participants become a rice farmer for half a day, learning how to select seeds, sow and harvest the crop. Later, they will indulge in a memorable rice-tasting session. Contact Diethelm Travel Laos at nataly.w@la.diethelmtravel.com for more details.

Vientiane's new MICE centre

Completed in October 2012 with Chinese aid, the Lao International Convention Centre was constructed primarily as the

main venue for the ninth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) that took place a month later in Vientiane. The 25,000m² centre can accommodate 3,000 people.

Visit an elephant sanctuary

Located two hours from Luang Prabang, the Elephant Conservation Centre opened in Sayaboury in January 2012 and hosted the annual Lao Elephant Festival the following month. The sanctuary primarily acts as a hospital for injured elephants and cooperates with numerous

conservation organisations worldwide to provide care for the animals. Accommodation is available at the centre, in addition to trekking and other activities.

Luxury stay on the riverside

Located on the banks of the Mekong River in Vientiane, the Landmark Mekong Riverside Hotel is said to be the country's first five-star international standard hotel. Targeting both leisure and business travellers, the contemporary hotel offers some 200 rooms and suites.

VIETNAM

More fun for visitors

Insider tour of HCMC

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Tours' new

guided day

trip visits the

Notre Dame Cathedral,

the Central Post Office

and the War Remnants

Museum, with a walk

around the city centre

and a cruise down the

Saigon River.



Notre Dame Cathedral

debuting in October 2011, and it is still drawing the crowds. Perched atop AB Tower on the 26th and 27th floors, the upscale venue features a restaurant, a sky bar and lounge with panoramic views of the city. The open-air exterior was designed by DWP Thailand (the firm behind Bangkok's Sirocco), a drink menu crafted by German mixologist Bernardo Bernard while a resident DJ begins his set every night at 22.00.

Nha Trang links with Moscow

Vietnam Airlines will commence a weekly service from Nha Trang to Moscow using Boeing 777-200ER aircraft from April 5, marking the country's third air link to the Russian capital city. During the winter season, flight frequency on the Nha Trang-Moscow segment will be ramped up to twice-weekly from October 17.

Tours of love

Exotissimo Vietnam is offering a selection of community exchange tours in collaboration with non-profit organisations, designed to offer travellers a taste of local life while giving back to the communities visited. The first is a partnership with UK-registered Bloom Microventures that gives travellers the opportunity to experience rural life in Vietnam for a day. The charity provides microcredit to women living below the poverty line. Tour fees will go to funding low-interest loans for women whom tour participants will get to meet during the tour. The second is a half-day traditional painting and lantern-making workshop. Participants will try their hand at Vietnamese painting and making an iconic Hoi An lantern, as well as enjoy a scenic boat ride across the river.

Sail down Halong Bay in style

Au Co Cruises started sailing through the UNESCO World Heritage Site on its pair of steel-hulled, three-storey luxury cruisers in March 2012. Each boat boasts 32 spacious cabins equipped with private bathrooms and balconies, while facilities include a restaurant, a bar, a spa and a Jacuzzi.

Saigon gets new mall

Vincom Center shopping complex opened its doors last October in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City's downtown. The massive mall contains a total of 15 floors (six of which are underground) and a total commercial space of more than 38,000m² – much of which are dedicated to international brands from Banana Republic to Hermes. The 300-room Vinpearl Luxury HCMC hotel, equipped with MICE facilities, occupies the building's fifth to 15th floors.

Lounge at lofty heights

The sleek Chill Sky Bar created a buzz on Ho Chi Minh City's party scene when it

MALAYSIA

New charms for popular destinations



Legoland arrives in Johor

Since opening its doors last September in Nusajaya, Johor, Legoland Malaysia has been drawing families with its collection of more than 40 interactive rides, shows and attractions. The 30-hectare destination is home to seven themed areas which are suitable for all ages. The centrepiece is Miniland, where Asian landmarks have been recreated using more than 30 million Lego bricks.

More to do in Langkawi

Sunmall brought a new buzz to Langkawi island when it opened on Pantai Tengah last year. Owned by Sun Group, the mall is home to a row of entertainment and F&B outlets such as Sunba Retro Bar, Sunutra, Sunkarma and Sun Café, all of which are able to cater to private functions.

Big world for little children

KidZania Kuala Lumpur is the city's latest indoor theme park for children between the ages of four and 17. The family edutainment centre allows children to experience the adult world through role-playing activities, with 60 establishments offering 90 authentic jobs ranging from firemen and policemen to hair stylists and newscasters.

Sandakan gets a Four Points

The 300-room Four Points by Sheraton Sandakan opened on May 30, 2012, becoming the first international hotel brand in Sandakan, Sabah's second largest city. The resort houses the largest function space in the city, boasting nine conference and banquet spaces, with a 620m² grand ballroom that can accommodate 500 guests in a theatre setting. Dining facilities include The Eatery, an all-day dining restaurant; Wrapped, a casual deli; and The Best Brew, a laid-back lounge that offers a selection of beers from the hotel's Best Brews programme.

Splashing good fun

Waterplexx 5D opened its doors at the popular Sunway Lagoon theme park on November 2, 2012. The new water-based attraction can seat 36 people, and viewers will be given 3D glasses. Throughout the five-minute movie, they will be tossed backwards, forwards and sideways in their seats. The ride engages the audience's sense of sight, sound, smell and touch, and at the end, everyone comes out of the hall soaking wet.

Port Dickson's kids fantasy

The 300-room Best Western Prima Inland Sea Resort opened on February 6, offering a lagoon-style swimming pool, which comes with waterslides, pirate ships, whirlpools and waterfalls, a kids' club, a games room, an open air theatre for live performances in the evening, and many other facilities. The property also has 16 multipurpose function rooms and a 875m² Grand Prima Ballroom, perfect for corporate meetings and incentive events.

THAILAND

New draws from north to south

Bangkok gets new event venue

The Bangna Convention Centre has been taken over by serviced apartment operator Oakwood and is currently undergoing a major renovation to reopen in 2Q2013. Located next to the 167-room Oakwood Residence Garden Towers Bangna, the centre's facilities include the pillar-less Ratchaphruek Ballroom, which can accommodate up to 1,000 guests and is equipped with a sizable banquet kitchen and state-of-the-art audio and visual systems.

See Chiang Mai on two wheels

Segway Gibbon has come up with a fun and innovative way for travellers to explore Thailand's culturally rich northern province, Chiang Mai. Visitors



Zip around town in style

can glide through the ancient city's landmarks on two-wheeled, self-balancing electric transport vehicles. Organised by the company behind the popular Flight of the Gibbon jungle zipline tours, these eco-friendly tours vary in duration and route, and include

a 15-minute training session. They are ideal for families.

Feel the riverside buzz

Launched in early 2012, the open-air Asiatique The Riverfront Mall has transformed Bangkok's Chao Phraya River into one of the hottest place in the city. The venue incorporates more than 1,500 boutiques and 40 restaurants, with new eateries opening on a regular basis. Available cuisines range from traditional British pub grub to sushi, while eclectic entertainment includes Thai puppet performances and Calypso ladyboy show.

Cycle around the capital

Traffic-clogged Bangkok can sometimes be a tricky destination to get around,

but the introduction of a new bike rental scheme in November 2012 aims to reduce such problems by renting out 100 bicycles at MRT Sam Yan and BTS Siam train stations. The project is slated to expand to 50 train stations with 500 bicycles in the next few months. In addition, it is possible to purchase a registration card which entitles users to an insurance package.

Khao Lak's new five-star resort

The 125-room Best Western Premier Khaolak Southsea has opened in southern Thailand. Fitted with luxurious trimmings, the new resort boasts a classic design, public areas with natural lighting, an outdoor swimming pool and two restaurants. There are also event facilities and a 24-hour business centre.

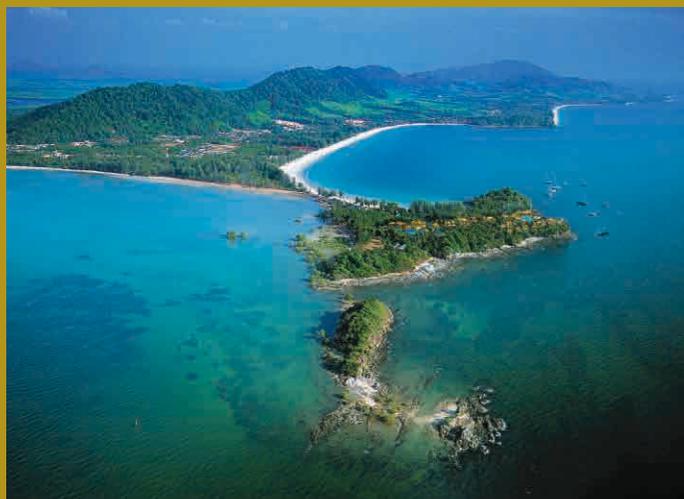
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Sri Lanka sees good footfalls



Arrivals from German-speaking markets are up for 2012 and the trade is sure of further growth. By **Feizal Samath**

Travellers from Germany to Sri Lanka are set to increase this year in addition to those from German-speaking markets like Switzerland and Austria, officials said.

According to official Sri Lanka Tourism (SLT) figures for 2012, little over a million visitors – a record number – swept into the country from all parts of the world. Germans accounted for 71,642, up 28.3 per cent from 2011 while Switzerland grew by 42.1 per cent to 20,054 and Austria up 27.6 per cent to 7,991.

According to Dharma Dharmapala, general manager of Lanka Sportreizen, one of the country's biggest adventure, leisure and eco-tourism companies, the Germany market is growing. "We expect a 20 per cent increase in our customers from Germany in first quarter 2013," he said.

He said in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Germany was the largest producer with 100,000 arrivals out of 400,000 annually.



Lokuhetty: German is tops

But that fell due to many reasons including strife and conflict in Sri Lanka. Switzerland was also a good market until SriLankan Airlines

stopped flying to Zurich last year.

Despite that, Dharmapala remains optimistic about the opportunities in the market and have signed up with new agents in Europe in addition to maintaining links with the older ones in adventure and leisure.

Anura Lokuhetty, CEO and deputy chairman of Serene Pavillions, a high-end boutique hotel south of the capital, said that up to 2004 Germany was the number one market before it gave way to the UK. Today, the recession in Europe has resulted in India overtaking the UK as Sri Lanka's top source market.

Lokuhetty, a veteran in the trade and former chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourists Hotels Association, expects Germany to match UK arrivals this year. "Germany is our number one customer at the hotel (at rates of US\$600 per room night)," he noted, followed by the UK and Switzerland.

Many of the tour guides and villagers close to hotels in Sri Lanka are able to converse in the German language, Lokuhetty pointed out, adding: "Western Europe is still Sri Lanka's biggest source by region, with Germany showing the strongest growth."

Malin Hapugoda, managing director of Aitken Spence Hotels, said the company was optimistic about Western European tourists, particularly from Germany. "Although India is the biggest source market, visitors from Germany and UK are our biggest visitors to beach hotels as the former segment is not too attracted to the beaches."

Country puts forth stellar tourism performance

Sri Lankan tourism performed better than expected in 2012 with a million arrivals, skating past its projected target of 950,000.

The country performed better than its neighbour, the Maldives Islands which targeted over a million visitors but dropped short by 42,000 and closed the year at 958,027.

Significant source markets that saw growth were China, up 58.1 per cent to 25,781; Russia, up 32.8 per cent to 28,402; and Germany, up 28.2 per cent to 71,642 against 2011 figures. India, the country's largest source tourism market, recorded a marginal increase at 2.9 per cent to 176,340 while the UK, the second largest market, grew by 7.7 per cent to 114,218.

According to Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLDA) director general, Vipula Wanigasekera, tourism promotional efforts have been focused on emerging markets such as China, Russia, Ukraine, India, Japan, South Korea and other Far Eastern countries, and some of these promotions yielded results.

"This is the focus we have this year too, while we consolidate our established markets in the West and Asia," he said.

China will not only be draw-

ing the attention of the Sri Lankan tourism authorities. Other tourism sellers, such as Malaysia Airlines, are keen to leverage on the huge Chinese outbound potential to Sri Lanka.



Cinnamon Grand Colombo hosted several major MICE events in 2012

According to Manmohan Singh, general manager of Malaysia Airlines in Colombo, the airline wants to be part of Sri Lanka's robust growth. It brought a group of 15 travel consultants and journalists from Xiamen in South-eastern China last December to the destination.

"We are the first foreign carrier to do this kind of promotion to attract Chinese travellers to Sri Lanka," he said.

The group, hosted by the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB), visited the tourist towns of Colombo, Negombo, and Sigiriya.

Singh said Malaysia Airlines is a network carrier and it would leverage on this to assist tourism growth in Sri Lanka.

However, Sri Lanka is regarded as an expensive destination, with five-star hotel rooms going for US\$180 a night – more than what South Asian hotels are charging.

Pricey room rates have affected occupancies in five-star hotels in the capital. In 2012, most five-star hotels in Colombo averaged 60-65 per cent occupancy while smaller hotels in the one-to-three-star category, charging US\$80 per night, registered over 80 per cent occupancy.

Rohan Karr, director/CEO of the Cinnamon Grand, Colombo's largest five-star hotel, said there was flat growth in the city last year.

Karr said: "We did well because there were major MICE events including two world tournaments relating to cricket... not because of leisure travel."

He noted that luxury hotels that are charging current room rates must offer good value for money, if they are to attract customers.

"With more travellers looking for cheaper accommodation, more three- and four-star properties will come up in Colombo," he said.

Hotels | A rush for more rooms

Some 4,000 rooms are expected to be added to the hotel room stock in Sri Lanka this year as the country gears up to welcome a projected 1.2 million visitors.

According to Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLDA) director general, Vipula Wanigasekera, many of the hotels that have been undergoing refurbishments are nearing completion and will be ready this year.

The government is targeting 45,000 rooms by 2016 when Sri Lanka is expecting 2.5 million arrivals. This year's arrival projections are set to raise the room stock to 28,920 from a targeted 21,960 in 2011.

Among hotels slated to come up in the next few years are Shangri-La Galle Face in Colombo with 500 rooms, Shangri-La, Hambantota with 50 villas, the Beira City Hotel in Colombo with 300 rooms, Mövenpick City Hotel with 224 rooms and Ananthara Hotel with 180 rooms.

A 306-room Sheraton is due to open next October, while a 200-key Marriott will emerge in southern Weligama next year.

Meanwhile, The Kingsbury, a five-star, 230-room property has opened last December after being closed since February 2012 for refurbishment. The handsome property used to be the Ceylon Continental Hotel.

Wanigasekera said many infrastructure that was coming on stream this year would enhance Sri Lanka's tourism product.

Phase one of the Mattala International Airport at Hambantota will open this month with Flydubai, SriLankan Airlines, Mihin Lanka and Emirates so far agreeing to operate flights there.

The 35-km Colombo-Katunayake expressway is due to be completed in 2H2013, cutting travel time between the airport and the capital to under 30 minutes from 90 minutes now.

Wanigasekera believes that new infrastructure, especially expressways, will help develop tourism and attract high-end travellers.

Anura Lokuhetty, CEO/deputy chairman of Serene Pavillions, thinks Sri Lanka is ready for even more arrivals. "We need to focus on the top-end as we have a wonderful product to offer," he said.

Gamini Mathew, managing director of the one-star, 50-room Colombo City Hotel, plans to expand the property as tourism is doing well in the city. His profits have risen by 15 per cent while occupancy is at 86 per cent now.

Mathew said the hotel had invested Rs100 million (US\$785,979) to add another 30 guest rooms to the property and upgrade it to a three-star status.

Airlines | Positive winds of change in Colombo's skies

At least three new airlines are flying into Colombo in the next few weeks joining a host of Asian, Middle Eastern and European carriers, and adding more than 2,000 seats per week to the existing seat capacity.

Airline industry officials welcomed the new arrivals, saying more airlines and increased frequencies provide better choices for travellers.

On February 1, Turkish Airlines launched a four-weekly flight to Colombo, using an Airbus A340-300 with more than 100 seats.

Come March, Korean Air will fly to Colombo thrice-weekly on an Airbus 330 with six first class seats, 18 business class seats and 252 economy seats, while British Airways will commence thrice-weekly services from Garwick on a Boeing 777 with more than 300 seats.

Korean Air would be only one of three airlines after Emirates and Singapore Airlines to operate first class cabins to Sri Lanka.

Officials revealed that Malaysia Airlines and Etihad would be raising their flight frequencies – from seven a week to 10 from

April and from four to seven a week from March/April respectively.

On the other hand, Gulf Air which operated five flights a week from Bahrain withdrew services to Colombo from February 10.

Meanwhile SriLankan Airlines will focus on consolidating operations and improving efficiencies this year. Its chief marketing officer, G T Jayaseelan, told the *Daily* that the airline would not be operating new sectors, nor acquiring new aircraft, but would focus on enhancing the product.

Jayaseelan revealed that the airline would be adding flatbeds to all its business class seats to Europe, and installing check-in kiosks at the Colombo airport to enable independent check-ins by passengers and reduce waiting time in queues.

“You can check in at the kiosk and if you have only hand luggage, walk away with the boarding card,” Jayaseelan said, adding that airline staff with hand-held devices would also check-in passengers in queues to speed up the process.

He said SriLankan Airlines



would also focus on India and China and adjust flights and increase capacity when the need arose.

Sri Lankan budget carrier, Mihin Lanka which is part of the SriLankan Airlines group, will soon add Delhi to its network to offer more options to passengers. Nilusha Kodithuwakku, gen-

eral manager of H.I.S. Travel Lanka, which is headquartered in Japan, said her agency was starting to see good potential from a new market – Turkey – following the launch of new flights between the two countries.

H.I.S. Travel Lanka recently hosted two Turkish TV journal-

ists on a familiarisation tour of Sri Lanka. The resulting travel documentary will be shown on national TV in Turkey.

Although Sri Lanka draws a minute arrival from Turkey, with an average of 114 visitors per month, Kodithuwakku expects the number to grow by 15 per cent this year.

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Germany posts growth for China

Destination promotions, strong trade links give German arrivals a boost. Reports by **Hong Xu**

Germany is China's top Western Europe market for tourism, and the 11th largest overseas source of arrivals for the country, posting a year-on-year growth of 3.7 per cent in the first 11 months of 2012 to reach 617,700 tourists.

While German leisure arrivals have been stable in recent years, the number of business visitors have grown rapidly due to favourable Sino-German economic and trade links.

To keep German travellers enamoured with China, the Chinese tourism authorities have invested in destination promotions. Their efforts include organising photo exhibitions themed around China in German cities, partnering PATA in destination promotions, and supporting tourism companies in creating and launching new tours to China for the German market.

Besides having an office in Frankfurt, the China National Tourism Administration also maintains a presence in other European markets such as Madrid, Paris, London, Zurich, Rome and Moscow.

Latest tourism statistics from the Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration show that Germany is the fourth largest overseas tourism source market for Shanghai. In the first eleven months of 2012, Shanghai welcomed 236,458 tourists from

Germany, up 0.77 per cent year-on-year.

Although official arrival figures are not out at press time, He Jianmin, a professor from the Tourism Management department of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, expects German arrivals to the cosmopolitan city to reach 250,000 by end-2012, up 0.5 per cent from the previous year.

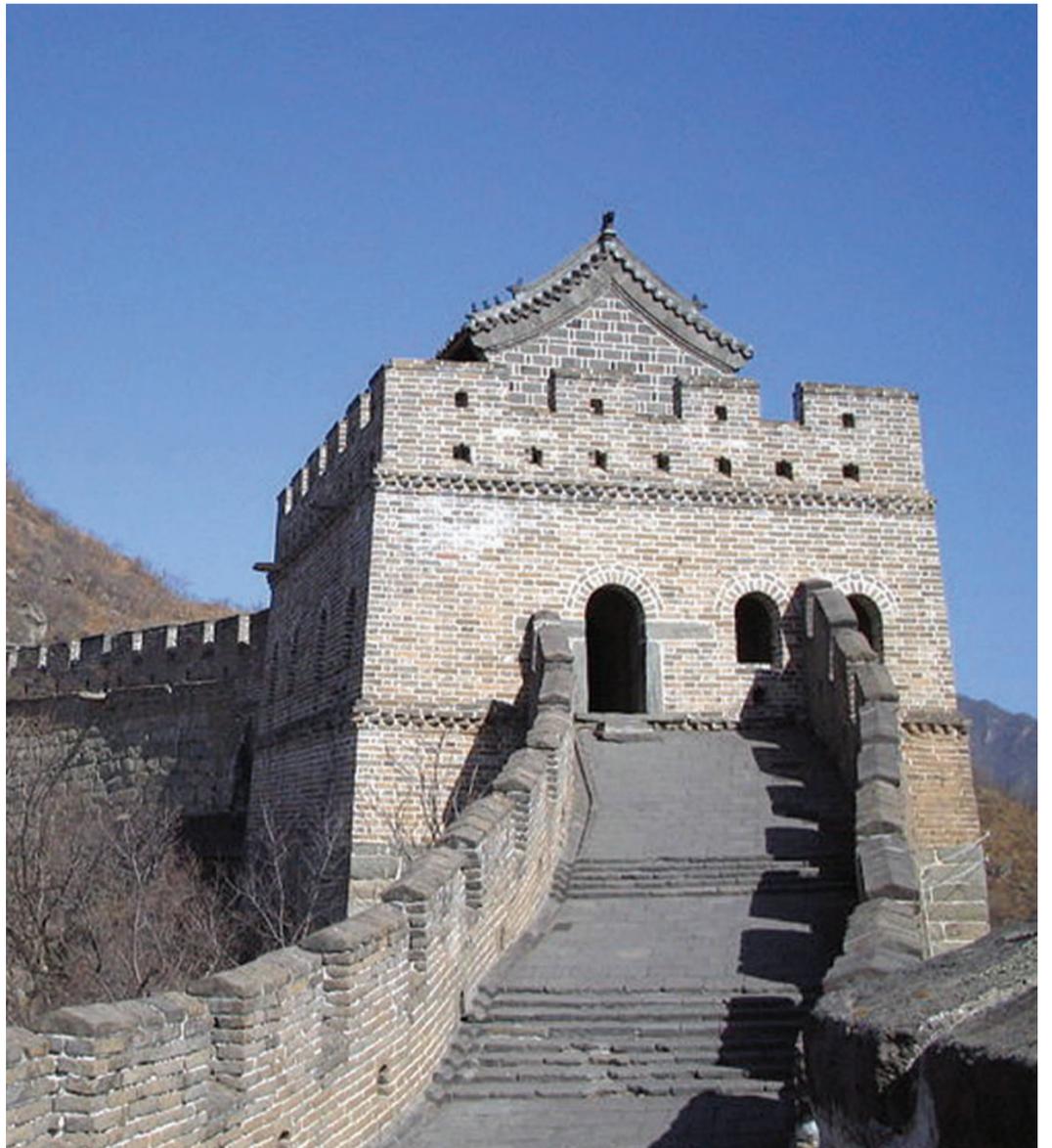
Besides Shanghai, other Chinese cities such as Beijing, Xi'an, Chongqing, Yangtze, the River Three Gorges region and Yichang are popular among German travellers too, according to Wang Zheng, inbound travel department general manager at Shanghai China International Travel Service.

She noted that these travellers tended to stay in China for an average of 12 days.

Although business from German-speaking markets had declined in the past five years for Shanghai China International Travel Service, Wang is confident of better business this year.

She told the *Daily*. "We have received a considerable number of (bookings to date). Besides bookings for the usual destinations in China, we have also seen an increasing number of travellers asking for tours to Tibet and the areas around Mount Everest."

She predicts a 20 per cent increase in customer volume this year over 2011.



Beijing is among the hot destinations in China for German visitors; Great Wall of China pictured here

Arrivals down but Shanghai keeps up tourism improvements

Following the hugely successful Shanghai World Expo in 2010 which was attended by 72 million domestic and international visitors, the city's tourist arrivals have been on a downward slide.

In 2011, Shanghai welcomed 8.2 million overseas tourists, a dip of 3.9 per cent over the previous year.

In the first eleven months of 2012, inbound arrivals to Shanghai was 7.4 million, down 1.7 per cent year-on-year.

He Jianmin, a professor with the Tourism Management department of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, said Shanghai would record eight million visitors for the full year of 2012, a two per cent decline over 2011, and 7.9 million this year, down one per cent year-on-year.

Despite a sliding arrival figure, He said Shanghai's tourism sector still had much to celebrate.



He pointed to the recent opening of the China Art Palace – the former China Pavilion built for the Expo – and the Shanghai Contemporary Art Museum –

the former Future Pavilion – as well as the hosting of the 9th Shanghai Biennale in 2012 as highlights to remember.

At the launch of the China

International Travel Mart in Shanghai last November, Shao Qiwei, chairman of the China National Tourism Administration, underlined his continued confidence in the city's tourism appeal.

Shao described Shanghai as "one of the most important economic centres in the world and a globally famous tourism destination" and added that the city was "sparing no effort to build itself in to a world-renowned tourism (destination)".

Attention has also been given to improving Shanghai's meetings sector. On October 12 last year, the Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration and Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Quality and Technical Supervision jointly issued a set of guidelines on the service delivery of conference organisers.

The Management & Service Standard of the Conference Industry, Part 1: Conference Organ-

izers specifies the basic requirements for conference organisers, conference services, conference management, continuous service improvement and compliance assessment, which are aimed at improving the service quality and professionalism of Shanghai's conference industry.

Meanwhile, Shanghai China International Travel Service has observed the rise of a new challenge. According to Ding Jianmin, assistant general manager of the travel firm, international travellers, particularly those from the US, the UK, Germany, France, Australia and New Zealand, are starting to drop guided tours in Shanghai in favour of free-and-easy arrangements.

Ding explained that the city was becoming more accessible, enabling English-speaking visitors to find their way around by following street signs or seeking help from English-educated locals.

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Malaysia evolves its lures

Customised tours and niche products will keep Germans coming. Reports by **S Puvaneswary**



KL CityWalk is the Malaysian capital's latest lifestyle attraction. Opened in January 2012, the alfresco strip mall features shops and dining outlets located along a 500m walkway

Inbound tour operators specialising in German-speaking markets concur that the depreciation of the euro and high airfares in 2012 had resulted in a poor showing of arrivals to Malaysia. Some have even put forth pessimistic forecasts for 2013.

Noor M Ismail, director, business development, Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, said the company had seen a 20 per cent dip in German-speaking arrivals last year. He expects a further deterioration in the market this year, as travellers become even more cautious about spending on longhaul vacations.

To soften the blow of a declining German-speaking market, Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel has started to intensify its efforts to grow business from other source markets such as the UK and Eastern Europe.

However, the travel company will not give up on German-speaking markets yet. It hopes to attract repeat visitors by promoting dual destinations such as Singapore and Malaysia, and Malaysia and Cambodia.

Diethelm Travel Malaysia managing director, Manfred

Kurz, has also witnessed weaker business from German-speaking markets.

He said: "Year-on-year, we have seen a 10 per cent drop in German-speaking markets. The weak euro is not helping matters, as the total package price has gone up by 10 to 20 per cent. Our overseas partners in Germany and Austria have also complained that airfares to the Far East have become more expensive."

"To drive business to Malaysia, we have intensified our efforts to promote customised products that reach out to niche market segments such as photography enthusiasts and those who love nature and soft adventure. There is still a following for normal packages such as city tours, and visits to the national parks of Taman Negara, Langkawi and Sabah are still in high demand."

Kurz expects business this year to be better than in 2012.

"We expect the euro to improve, and there is also growing interest from Germany and German-speaking markets for travel to Asia," he said.

Over at Asia Experience Tours, the firm's head of sales, Clement

Ho, said high-income travellers from German-speaking markets would continue to travel to Asia in 2013, sustaining business performance.

"(These travellers) can afford to spend and we will work with more tour operators that cater to the high-end clientele. We will develop more experiential, tailor-made itineraries," said Ho.

"We believe that this segment will look for experiential, in-depth tours that cover a combination of flavours such as highlands, jungles, culture and (beach retreats)."

A hotel that had seen an increase in German arrivals in 2012 and is optimistic about the future is Rebek Island Resort Langkawi – A Taj Hotel. Its director of sales and marketing, Andy Yow, said the company had seen a year-to-date growth of 35 per cent from Germany.

He added: "In 2012, we were featured in more agent brochures and won four awards from TripAdvisor. We believe that the awards gave travellers confidence in us, especially those who are visiting Langkawi for the first time. We are optimistic that in 2013, we will continue to see

double-digit growth as we plan to do a familiarisation trip for the German media and to continue working with Malaysia Airlines and Tourism Malaysia Germany on periodic tactical offers."

According to Tourism Malaysia, the country received 99,515 German tourists between January and September 2012, a 7.9 per cent increase over the corresponding period in 2011.

Arrivals from Switzerland also registered single-digit growth in the first nine months of 2012, compared to the year before. Arrivals totalled 20,684 for that period, a 9.7 per cent increase over 2011.

Tourism Malaysia's deputy director-general (planning), Azizan Noordin, believes that arrivals from German-speaking markets to Malaysia will continue to grow this year because travel demand for South-east Asia has "increased dramatically and Germans regard taking a holiday as an essential part of life."

He added: "Sightseeing and experiencing local culture have become top considerations for Germans (when it comes to choosing) a holiday destination. These are followed by beach and

nature/eco-tourism. Germans are also into health and wellness holidays, all of which Malaysia has to offer."

However, Azizan admits that a lack of direct air links between Germany and Malaysia is a stumbling block.

He said: "Currently only Malaysia Airlines provides direct daily connections between Kuala Lumpur and Frankfurt."

"Due to the lack of direct air connectivity to Germany, we will work with foreign carriers such as Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Etihad Airways, Qatar Airlines, Emirates and Kuwait Airlines by way of advertising, joint seminars and familiarisation visits for German-speaking travel (experts) and the media."

"We will also work with the NTOs of Singapore, Hong Kong, Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Dubai on joint destination promotions."

Tourism Malaysia will also woo high-yield German travellers by tapping niche segments such as couples looking to be wedded overseas and honeymooners, golfers, retirees (through the *Malaysia My Second Home* campaign) and MICE planners.

SURROUNDED EXQUISITELY BY 400 MILLION YEARS OLD LIMESTONE FEATURES....

So many worlds packed into one, the Lost World of Tambun, is an action-packed, exciting adventure with the most thrilling rides and attractions. Located in Ipoh, Perak with a mere distance of 2 hours' drive from Kuala Lumpur and with similar duration of 1 ½ hour drive north from Penang and flights from Singapore, this adventure haven is set for a weekend of mayhem oozing with family fun or a burst of eco-adventure that you're seeking or just that very special respite from your day-to-day stress, take it all in as you journey through the Seven (7) main elements that make up this unique world of adventure.

LOST WORLD WATER PARK & AMUSEMENT PARK

Exhilarating wet and dry rides to experience – from adrenaline boost speed-coaster rides or simply sit back and relax as you gently float around in a 600 meter length Adventure River to the amusement rides that are surely to swing you in the air for some knee-knocking, spine-tingling excitement and many more for all to enjoy!

LOST WORLD HOT SPRINGS & SPA

A unique majestic sanctuary for visitors to come and experience rejuvenating magical moments in mineral-rich and natural bio-thermal hot spring pools. Amongst the many health benefits include skin rejuvenation, better blood circulation, stress reduction, muscle pain reliever through the process of therapeutic hydro-massage. Slip into the soothing warm water and feel your worries wash away as you rest and revive.

LOST WORLD TIGER VALLEY

According to National Geographic, there are only 400-500 Siberian Tigers left in the wild and Lost World of Tambun is home to five of these magnificent tigers. Catch them and their handlers at play and observe their agility and strength as they jump over rocks and logs to get to their meat during the tiger feeding shows.

LOST WORLD PETTING ZOO

If that's not enough, take a walk on the wild side at our Petting Zoo, where you'll be able to feed, touch and experience a large variety of adorable animals in their natural habitats or be simply in awe of the large aviary that houses over 500 birds and the Serpentarium that features a host of slithering reptiles. The Petting Zoo is created as close to nature as possible for a fun edutainment purpose.

LOST WORLD TIN VALLEY

The Tin Valley was created to take our guests back to the past, where the state of Perak was once the world's largest tin-mining producer. Today, our kids can learn about this history while having fun.

LOST WORLD TEAM BUILDING PARK

Built in a series of unique high rope elements designed to showcase the special limestone environment of the Lost World of Tambun. Explore the 13

High Rope Course which is nestled amidst the soothing sounds of a 60 feet waterfall or experience an adrenaline rush from a height of 65 feet on Malaysia's highest **Leap of Faith aka Para Jump**. Another intriguing adventure is the **Wild Woosey** and the rock climbing activity known as **Via Ferrata With Natural Abseil** or simply enjoy the **Zip Line** as you zip across on a 120 meter long cable over a beautiful lake.

ADVENTURES FOR THE ECO-ENTHUSIAST

Need more of an adrenaline rush? Opt for the three-hour cave exploration experience at the Six Mile Tunnel. Eco-enthusiasts are guided by experienced guides through the 700 meter long cave tunnel; walking through knee-deep mud, swimming across a shallow pool, before continuing to walk through chest-deep water inside the tunnel. Along the way, you'll get to experience a bout of history where you'll get to learn about mining artifacts as well as stalactites in the making.

LOST WORLD HOTEL

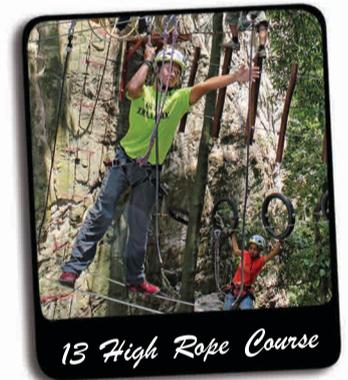
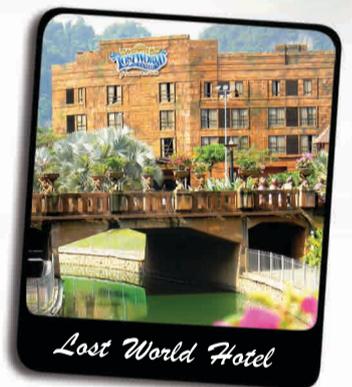
The Lost World Hotel consists of 174 hotel rooms where guests can choose to stay at a selection of rooms which comes inclusive of two breakfast and two tickets to the Lost World Hot Springs & Spa by Night. Business entities and MICE groups that are interested to conduct their team building or meetings can do so at any of the Hotel's seven function rooms with a capacity ranging from 10 to 200 people.

"COMING SOON" April 2013

FIRST ROLLER COASTER RIDE IN PERAK

For thrill-seekers it's a love affair with the excitement of what a roller coaster offers and it has been the "must ride" attraction in theme parks for more than a century. With just one look, it's obvious why they are often called "scream machines", hence we would like to introduce our FIRST ever Roller Coaster ride in Perak.

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More Than Just A Theme Park



Malaysia sees single-digit tourism growth in 2012



Seasonal flights from Vladivostok to Kota Kinabalu and Langkawi (pictured here) will boost Russian arrivals

Malaysia posted overall tourism growth in 2012.

Tourist arrivals rose to 25 million, compared to 24.7 million in 2011, registering a growth of 1.3 per cent. Tourism receipts climbed to RM60.6 billion (US\$19.6 billion), up 3.9 per cent over the previous year.

South-east Asia continues to be the largest source region for Malaysia's tourism sector. Arrivals from Singapore topped the chart with 13 million visitors in 2012. However, the figure was 2.7 per cent lower than 2011's 13.4 million visitor count.

Indonesia and China ranked second and third with 2.4 million and 1.6 million arrivals in 2012 respectively. Both registered a year-on-year increase of 11.6 per cent and 24.6 per cent respectively.

Arrivals from the Philippines leapt 40.5 per cent in 2012, generating 508,744 footfalls for Malaysia and placing the source

market in seventh position.

The surge in Filipino arrivals was aided by air access enhancements. Philippines' AirAsia began daily Clark-Kuala Lumpur flights on June 9 last year, while Airphil Express commenced thrice-weekly services between Manila and Kuala Lumpur on June 21. Zest Air launched four-weekly services between Manila and Kuala Lumpur on October 28.

Azizan Noordin, deputy director-general (planning), Tourism Malaysia, said: "Our future plan is to work on joint collaboration with outbound travel (consultants) from Los Angeles and the Philippines to tap the American market visiting the Philippines and attract them to extend their holiday in Malaysia."

China is another star performer for Malaysia, having exceeded the tourism bureau's target of 1.3 million for 2012.

Azizan explained that overall tourism growth in 2012 was

made possible by stronger efforts in promoting Malaysia as a luxury destination in mature markets such as India, China, the Middle East and Hong Kong.

"In Europe, we marketed Malaysia's well-kept parks and gardens," he said.

"We also worked on joint promotions with both the national carrier and other foreign airlines that fly to Malaysia."

Meanwhile, Russia has been identified as an emerging source market, and efforts to attract more Russian visitors to Malaysia were rolled out last year.

While there are currently no direct flights between Malaysia and Russia, a collaboration between Vladivostok Airlines and Malaysian tour agency Tourism Vacation Resources will see 17 seasonal flights from Vladivostok to Kota Kinabalu and Langkawi being rolled out between December 17, 2012 and March 26, 2013. These charters are expected to lure 2,200 tourists to Malaysia.

Hotels | A busy pipeline

Malaysia is poised to welcome a crop of new hotels in 2013, several of which are located beyond Kuala Lumpur.

Seri Chenang Resort & Spa Langkawi, which opened on January 1 this year, features six villas, each built to replicate traditional houses from across six Malaysian states. Each villa is equipped with a kitchen and a living and dining area.

The property features facilities such as an infinity pool, a gym, a reading room, a boutique shop and a spa, and is approximately an eight-minute drive from Langkawi International Airport.

Nestled in the quiet fishing village of Kampung Sungai Kuala Chenang, guests can watch fishermen bring in their catch and even buy freshly caught fish from them to be prepared by the resort.

In the capital city, the bustling transportation hub of Kuala Lumpur Sentral will see the addition of a new hotel brand, The Aloft Kuala Lumpur Sentral. Scheduled to debut in 3Q2013, the 31-storey tower will feature 482 rooms, several function rooms and a ballroom which can accommodate up to 850 people.

Meanwhile, Accor will ramp up its presence in Malaysia with four new properties in 2013.

Slated for a 2Q2013 opening is

Pullman Kuala Lumpur Bangsar, which will feature 513 contemporary designed guestrooms and suites, four restaurants, a deli, two bars, a swimming pool, a fitness centre, a business centre, two ballrooms and 11 meeting rooms that can accommodate up to 1,500 guests.

ibis Styles hotels – Accor's premium economy brand offering an all-inclusive accommodation package with breakfast and Wi-Fi – are set to roll out across the country in the fourth quarter, with 118 rooms in Ipoh, 108 rooms in Johor's Lahad Datu and 165 rooms in Kota Kinabalu.

Over in Ipoh, The Haven Lakeside Residences will open in 3Q2013. Managed by Best Western International under its Premier brand, the property will be surrounded by limestone hills and forests. There will be 497 units across three 26-storey towers, of which 100 units will be hotel rooms and the rest condominiums.

Located 15 minutes from the city centre of Ipoh, The Haven will feature amenities such as a 60m seahorse-shaped pool, a spa, an amphitheatre, a landscaped jogging track, a business centre, conference and meeting facilities, tennis and badminton courts, a gym, fibre-optic connectivity and shuttle bus service.



Pullman Bangsar Kuala Lumpur is set to debut in 2Q2013

Airlines | Greater connectivity paves way for more longhaul arrivals

Malaysia will continue to enjoy improved air access this year.

Last month, Malaysia Airlines (MAS) introduced an additional four-weekly Boeing B737-800 flights to its daily B737-800 services between Kuala Lumpur and Taipei, boosting seat capacity in this sector by 640 seats per way.

Nantha Travel & Tours managing director, M Nantha Gopal, said: "The additional frequencies will provide an opportunity for passengers transiting on one-world (alliance) carriers in Taipei to fly to Malaysia on MAS."

Meanwhile, MAS' monopoly on the Kuala Lumpur-Paris sector will come to an end once Air France launches thrice-weekly services on a 247-seat B777-200 aircraft from April 22.

Air France's entry will almost



Air France will begin a new Kuala Lumpur-Paris service in 2013

double the available seat capacity between Kuala Lumpur and Paris – MAS currently operates daily flights on this route using the 282-seat B777-200 aircraft – and will also complement its existing Kuala Lumpur-Amsterdam services operated by partner carrier KLM Royal Dutch Airlines.

Yap Sook Ling, managing director, Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, said: "The increase in seat capacity will cre-

ate more interest from French organisers to hold incentives in Malaysia. It will also be good for inbound players as French FITs tend to be more adventurous, visiting the outskirts and not sticking to the main tourist areas."

Another inbound operator, Alex Lee, CEO of Ping Anchorage Travel & Tours, said: "This is exciting news for us as French travellers tend to stay two weeks

to a month when they visit Malaysia.

"We have developed nature-based programmes for this market, including diving and trekking as well as culture- and heritage-based (tours) with stays in boutique hotels."

Set to take off in mid-March is new Malaysia-based LCC Malindo Air, which will begin with domestic flights linking Kuala Lumpur with Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia before commencing international services to India in April.

The airline will take delivery of two B737-900ER aircraft this month, followed by two more in April and May each, paving the way to reach 12 aircraft by December. It intends to fly regionally from its hub in KLIA2.

Meanwhile, AirAsia X is expanding its network in China with the launch of six-weekly flights from its Kuala Lumpur base to Shanghai (Pudong) on February 19. The service will turn daily from May 1.

AirAsia X will also ramp up frequency on its Kuala Lumpur-Melbourne sector to nine-weekly flights from May 1 and subsequently to 12 a week by July 1.

Frequency on its current daily Kuala Lumpur-Taipei service will be boosted to ten times per week starting May 1 and then twice-daily from July 1.

Its five-weekly flights between Kuala Lumpur and Chengdu will be hiked up to six times a week by May 1. Come July 1, AirAsia X will operate the service on a daily basis.

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Thailand keeps them coming

Defying doleful expectations, the Germanic markets put up a good showing in 2012, prompting Thai tourism sellers to project healthy arrivals this year. Reports by **Timothy France**



Thailand is expected to do well with the Germanic markets in 2013; Wat Phra Kaew pictured here

Many tourism stakeholders were concerned at the start of 2012 that longhaul arrivals to the kingdom would fall away in the wake of the eurozone's faltering economy.

As the year unfolded, the Germanic markets brought a pleasant surprise to Thai tourism sellers. Arrivals from Germany grew 10.8 percent to 681,566, arrivals from Switzerland grew 12.2 percent to 190,784, and arrivals from Austria grew 5.5 percent to 94,197.

Commenting on the performance, Juthaporn Rerngronasa,

deputy director for international marketing, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), said: "It was a good year for the Germanic markets, with arrivals growing better than expected given the economic crises in Europe and America."

Inbound agents were able to verify these figures, indicating strong growth towards the second half of the year.

Christoph Mueller, managing director of Go Vacation Thailand, said: "Arrivals were down at the beginning of the year, as the 2011 floods caused many German tourists, who normally book two months in advance, to

cancel or postpone their trips. But (business) picked up very quickly in the summer and later in the year. If not for the floods, this growth would have been higher for sure."

Diethelm's figures looked slightly different however, which CEO Richard Brouwer felt was not uncommon.

"Austria did extremely well and we saw a huge increase in business. This was due to the gain in back-to-back group business from two new accounts," said Brouwer.

"Germany grew marginally. Taking into consideration that

there was a slight price increase as well, one could conclude that this market remained stable for us. Switzerland saw a little decrease in revenue, mainly in the high-end segment as average spend fell slightly, although the number of pax was equal to that of 2011," he added.

Despite the slight dip in expenditure, Swiss tourists continued to top the pile of spenders and appeared relatively unfazed by the precarious eurozone economy, while Germany maintained its resilience.

In fact, the frugal outlook among holidaymakers is actually helping to drive up arrivals to Thailand, according to Juthaporn. She said: "Travellers are looking for value for money, which Thailand offers even when you factor in the cost of a long-haul airfare, and that has driven growth from the [Germanic] region."

Consequently most observers have a positive outlook for this year, with growth of Germanic arrivals to Thailand expected to continue at a similar rate.

Juthaporn said: "We expect arrivals from Germany to grow about seven percent this year, crossing the 700,000 mark. Thailand has always been a popular holiday choice for Germans, offering value for money, great service and hospitality, and growing depth in tourism products and activities."

This will be aided by increased seat capacity from second-tier European cities to Thailand, driven primarily by network expansion among the Middle Eastern carriers, while Thai Airways International (THAI) has also added Frankfurt to its A380 network.

Brouwer recognises that increased seat availability will create more competition within the marketplace and put downward pressures on fares, particularly during shoulder and low seasons when he expects major travel retailers such as Lidl Reisen and Aldi to run promotions. This will ultimately enhance Thailand's value for money appeal and drive arrivals up, catalysed by TAT's partnership promotions with many airlines.

Inbound operators have identified some distinct patterns of behaviours of Germanic travellers to Thailand.

"The majority of Germanic clients do a combination trip with a few days in Bangkok, a trip to the North and a beach destination. In terms of booking

patterns, they are organising the itinerary themselves and booking short trips of up to four days through tour operators, rather than a two-week-long group tour, which gives them more flexibility and independence," said Mueller.

Combination travel in Thailand is gaining increasing importance, as the rate of repeat visits climbs. Repeat visits now contribute close to 60 per cent of total arrivals.

German and Swiss tourists in particular are heading to new destinations, moving from crowded Phuket to Khao Lak, and from Hua Hin to Pattaya which is becoming an increasingly dynamic city.

Thailand is also becoming increasingly regional, with tourists treating surrounding countries like additional Thai destinations to visit.

Brouwer explained: "Tourists will fly to Bangkok and then (onwards) to another nearby (destination) such as Myanmar or Yunnan (in south-western China). Country combinations are very important."

Encouraged by the high rate of repeat visitors and apparent customer loyalty, TAT is focusing its marketing efforts on first-time travellers. It is currently running a radio competition in Austria, offering a trip to Thailand for 30 school children.

The tourism bureau is also focusing on the luxury market with promotions in niche tourism sectors – wedding and honeymoon, health and wellness, golf, and eco-tourism. The latter is particularly important in Germanic markets where stronger interest from buyers has surfaced.

"Our strategy will focus on homestays, agritourism, voluntourism and green travel, and we are working with the Thai Eco-tourism and Adventure Travel Association (TEATA) to develop green routes and host fam trips for German travel agents," Juthaporn said.

Although this is a broad approach to international marketing as TAT looks to increase tourist expenditure, the approach is relevant to the Germanic markets.

"There is a trend that German repeaters are looking for more individual and stylish accommodation, something which has been applicable to the Swiss traveller for a long time, while Austrian tourists are far more price driven," noted Brouwer.



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Investments in new campaigns draw great harvest

Following consecutive years of political strifes and devastating floods, 2012 was among the least challenging years for Thailand in the last half decade, allowing the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to pursue stronger tourism growth.

Thailand achieved record-breaking visitor arrivals in 2012, crossing the 22 million mark for the first time. Figures tabulated by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports for the full year showed total arrivals of 22,303,065, up 15.98 percent over 2011. With that, Thailand has surpassed its 2012 target of 20.5 million international arrivals.

Leading this growth was China, which generated 2.7 million arrivals for Thailand in 2012. Malaysia followed closely with 2.5 million arrivals. East Asian footfalls totalled 12,502,194, up 20.8 per cent, in 2012.

TAT's goals for 2012 were supported by a plethora of new campaign concepts including the new *Thainess* campaigns that highlight the country's unique propositions such as Thai boxing. The NTO also reaped returns from its significant investments in digital marketing.

Commenting on the *Thailand Reunited #ThaiTales* travel blogger contest launched at WTM2012, TAT deputy governor for international marketing Europe, Africa, Middle East & America, Juthaporn Rerngro-



Thailand sailed through 2012 with a robust tourism performance, surpassing its arrival target for 2012

nasa, said: "Such campaigns are very effective in spreading a more credible message via word-of-mouth marketing. In countries with high Internet penetration such as the UK, this strategy is by far the best way of getting high-value returns on investment."

From Thaispective is a trio of short films that portray the Thai ways of life, culture and traditions from the eyes of locals living in three different regions. The multimedia campaign was also integrated into Facebook to encourage viewers to enter a contest for free trips to see Thai-

land from their own perspectives.

Last year, TAT also tried to shrug off Thailand's value-for-money reputation with focused campaigns targeting high-yield and niche markets like golf, wellness, weddings and ecotourism.

TAT London hosted a 12-day trip for British tour operators to scope out sustainable tourism offerings along the bureau's specially developed green routes.

In September, 90 tourism facilitators, health tourism organisations and health insurance companies attended the

Thailand Medical & Wellness Tourism Trade Fam Trip 2012 in Bangkok. According to the Department of Health Service Support, the number of medical tourists is expected to hit 2.5 million in 2012, up from 2.2 million in 2011, and generate 97.8 billion baht (US\$3.2 billion) in revenue.

In October last year, the first 160 of a planned 999 couples from China tied the knot in a mass wedding ceremony at Chalam. The campaign will continue through 2013.

These activities have been

strategically incorporated into TAT's DISCO Plan, which focuses on digital marketing, image building, sustainable development, crystallisation/crisis management and organisation management.

The NTO will give specific attention to the markets in Southeast Asia in its *Thailand and Beyond Strategy* to capitalise on increasing arrivals from the region, as well as China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, India and Australia.

TAT is targeting 22.2 million international arrivals for 2013.

Hotels | Get ready for more options

Driven by strong international tourist arrivals, Thailand's hotel inventory continues to grow despite the threat of oversupply in the market – nowhere more evident than Bangkok.

CBRE Thailand has estimated that Bangkok's hotel supply would increase by 28 per cent between 3Q2011 and 2014, with a majority in the three-star and four-star category. After a robust 2012, the growth momentum is expected to continue through 2013.

Hilton will launch the 182-room DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Sukhumvit Bangkok in March and the 287-room Hilton Sukhumvit Bangkok in May. Accor will debut the 174-room Mercure Bangkok Makkasan in 2Q2013 while it will be Carlson's turn to open the 290-room Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel Bangkok Sukhumvit come September, followed by InterContinental Hotel Group's 188-room Hotel Indigo Bangkok Wireless Road this year-end.

In the south, 5,080 rooms are expected to enter Phuket's market between March

2011 and 2015.

Among the island's most anticipated developments of 2013 is the five-star Nikki Beach Hotel and Spa opening in the fourth quarter with 151 suites and 23 villas. Also joining the five-star category is the Point Yamu by COMO, which will open in November with 109 keys.

Midscale openings in Phuket this year will be led by two international brands. The 120-key Days Hotel will mark the entry of Wyndham's Days Inn brand to Thailand in April, followed by the 164-key Hotel Novotel Phuket Kamala Beach in May.

Pattaya is also seeing a buzzing hospitality industry, driven by a strong business and MICE sector. C9 Hotelworks forecasts a four per cent growth in room supply between 2011 and 2016, with one third of the new 1,779 rooms to rise in Jomtien.

Thai Centara Hotels & Resorts is rolling out the 160-room Centara Grand Resort & Spa Pattaya in March, as well as the Centara Avenue Residence & Suites Pattaya with 380 condominium residences and a 100-room hotel some time in 2013.

Another five-star addition to Pattaya's burgeoning inventory is the 264-room Mövenpick White Sand Beach Resort Pattaya, which is scheduled to open its doors in October. In the midscale sector, Holiday Inn Express, which debuted in Bangkok last year, is due to launch a 200-room property in Pattaya later in the year.



DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Sukhumvit Bangkok opens this month



Airlines | Thailand sharpens access

Thai Airways International (THAI) is scaling new heights as it began taking delivery of its Airbus A380 order. The national carrier has introduced the A380 on its daily Bangkok-Frankfurt route since December 15, with Tokyo's Narita added to the superjumbo list on January 16, followed by Paris-Charles de Gaulle on February 16.

As aircraft deliveries continue through 2013, THAI will expand its A380 network to Osaka on August 16 and Sydney on September 16, with the sixth and final A380 set to be operated on the Bangkok-Heathrow sector in October.

Meanwhile, THAI Smile, THAI's light-premium airline launched in July 2012, has plans to start Phuket-Singapore flights this year. When that happens, THAI Smile will join Emirates' daily service from

Dubai and Thomson Airways' weekly service from London's Gatwick – both of which commenced late last year – in improving Phuket's air connectivity.

The launch of Thomson Airways' service on November 13 marked the resort island's first direct air link with the UK.

To build on China's emerging outbound segment, Nok Air is looking to launch services to Nanjing – where it already offers charter services to – whereas Thai AirAsia will add more Chinese cities to its network after starting flights to Xi'an and Wuhan back in 4Q2012.

Meanwhile, Cebu Pacific has commenced twice-weekly Cebu-Bangkok services from December 9, 2012, while VietJet Air started its first international link with the Ho Chi Minh City-Bangkok service on February 10.

Paving the way forward

TTG Asia asks Asian tour operators and experts how far their destinations have come in rolling out responsible travel initiatives, and what else needs to be done

Philippines Al B Linsangan III, president, Calamianes Expeditions & Ecotours

How sustainable is the Philippines in terms of tourism?

Having been identified as one of the protected ecotourism sites in the country, the Calamianes Islands, including Coron in northern Palawan, is very promising for sustainable tourism. Tourism's impact is being managed to ensure that it is kept within the destination's capacity.

The islands are more of a marine-based destination with the majority of activities being water-based (swimming, snorkelling, diving, etc), so we need to protect the reef and its adjacent ecosystem. One of the main efforts is to place mooring buoys to discourage anchorage on coral reefs.

We also helped to establish Marine Protected Areas and identify proper zoning (core zone, multiple use zone, restricted zone and buffer zones). This will help us to manage the area effectively while com-

binning conservation and tourism.

Are tourists increasingly interested in sustainable tour programmes when they visit the Philippines? What do they like?

Yes. In the case of Coron, we are now getting a good percentage of responsible tourists whom I call green travellers. Some programmes that we are considering in response to their interests include birdwatching, homestay with the locals, indigenous tours that include an immersion programme with tribal and indigenous communities, mangrove kayaking and nature interpretation.

But these programmes should have a low-impact base. They're not for mass tourism as we are also protecting the communities we work with.

What sustainable tourism products do you

hope to see more of in the Calamianes, and why?

I would look into authentic cultural events, which we have already started with the monthly Fullmoon Festival where indigenous communities showcase their customs and traditions in the form of dances, native drumbeats and songs; and ecotourism incorporating activities such as planting mangroves and coastal/beach clean-ups.

We recently started offering a multi-day sea safari on board an expedition *banca* boat, grilling fresh catch in the glow of a campfire, sleeping under the stars – the alluring simplicity of connecting with nature.

What do you hope to achieve in the area of sustainable tourism in 2013?

For Coron to be maintained as a destina-

tion for responsible tourism players and visitors. I hope also for Coron to establish guidelines on capacity management, sustainable tourism guidelines for all builders, investors, stakeholders and visitors, as well as for it to have sound and harmonised environmental policies, a developmental approach, cultural sensitivity and balanced economic policies. – **Rosa Ocampo**



Indonesia Ary Suhandi, founder and managing director, Indonesia Ecotourism Network

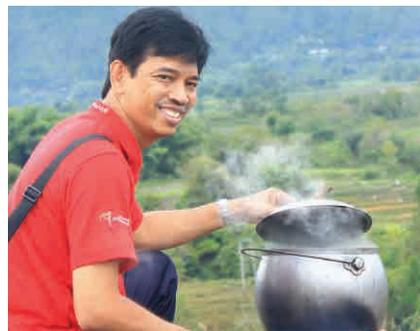
How sustainable is Indonesia in tourism?

Sustainability comprises three main principles – economic, environmental and socio-cultural values – that should automatically be part and parcel of tourism operations because the industry is dependent on nature and culture to yield economic value.

In the past, tourism businesses focused only on the economic aspects, but today there is a demand for tourism to make real contributions to the environment and the community through responsible management and activities.

Indonesia's sustainable tourism is still growing. To reach the next level, we need all stakeholders to move together, led by the government in creating regulations that support sustainable tourism.

Are tourists increasingly interested in sustainable tour programmes when they visit Indonesia? What do they like?



The demand for responsible tour programmes continues to grow. Today's travellers demand new experiences and expect to interact directly with the community. They feel that a trip is more rewarding when they can contribute to the preservation of culture and nature.

Travellers from Western Europe such as Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and Spain are still dominating the market (for

sustainable travel), followed by Australia and the US. We have also seen growing numbers from Japan and South Korea lately.

Voluntourism is rapidly becoming popular in areas such as East Java, Bali, Lombok and Flores, where travellers spend one to two weeks in a village teaching languages to the locals or renovating schools and traditional houses.

Tangkahan, at the feet of the Gunung Leuser National Park in North Sumatra, has grown quickly as a new ecotourism destination because of the local community's commitment to switch from felling trees to forest conservation, allowing them to reap the economic benefits of ecotourism. Tourist arrivals to the area have grown from 1,496 in 2010 to 2,470 in 2011, while visitorship rose to 3,147 between January and October 2012.

The Tanjung Puting National Park in East Kalimantan, known for its orangutan

rehabilitation centre, is also seeing more visitors despite its lack of accessibility. International arrivals increased from 3,542 in 2010 to 5,444 in 2011, and to 7,000 between January and October 2012.

What sustainable tourism products do you hope to see more of in Indonesia, and why?

More travel packages fostering the preservation of culture and nature. Such packages should become the signature products of Indonesia because the country is known for its diverse culture and history.

What do you hope to achieve in the area of sustainable tourism in 2013?

I expect to see the growth of voluntourism products in Indonesia, but to minimise negative impact, there is a need for a good standard of operations. The International Ecotourism Society has issued international voluntourism guidelines for tour operators. – **Mimi Hudoyo**

Brunei Sugumaran Nair, manager, inbound & MICE division, Freme Travel Services

How sustainable is Brunei in tourism?

Brunei is known as a nature lover's paradise, as more than 70 per cent of (the country) is still a tropical rainforest. There are many nature-based activities that visitors can enjoy, such as jungle trekking, snorkelling and diving.

Brunei is a small country, so one does not need to travel far to visit these attractions. For example, visitors can make a day trip to Tasek Merimbun National Park, an ASEAN Heritage Park, and return to the comfort of their hotels for the night.

Are tourists increasingly interested in sustainable tour programmes when they visit

Brunei? What do they like?

Yes, especially tourists from Australia and the Far East markets. A popular attraction is Ulu Temburong National Park, a tourist-friendly destination with footpaths and a canopy walkway that rises 50m from the forest floor. From this canopy walkway, visitors can have a bird's-eye view of the surrounding forest.

We have a chalet (in the park) called Freme Rainforest Lodge, which can fit 40 people. It is popular with incentive and teambuilding participants who want to spend a night and take part in activities such as whitewater rafting (or tackling) flying fox and high ropes. We also have

student groups from Singapore visiting to learn about the forests.

What sustainable tourism products do you hope to see more of in Brunei, and why?

While Brunei is known for its nature-based attractions and Malay culture, I feel that the supply side – the hotels – should also be more involved in corporate social responsibility initiatives. Properties themselves should incorporate elements of environmental conservation. The green movement in Europe is strong, and I believe that it will soon catch on in Asia. Brunei should be ready for this wave.

I would also like to see more green sem-

inars and conferences being held in Brunei for tour operators, so that we will have more exposure on this subject.

What do you hope to achieve in the area of sustainable tourism in 2013?

We hope to generate more international awareness of Brunei as a green destination and as the green heart of Borneo, and show tourists what the country can offer.

Brunei's offerings are so very different from (those in) other Asian cities. We are a unique destination because here the air is fresh, the city is safe and you can see wildlife in its natural habitat without having to travel long distances. – **S Puvaneswary**

Cambodia Grégoire Imberty, general manager, Exotissimo Travel Cambodia

How sustainable is Cambodia in tourism?

Cambodia's tourism development is still nascent outside Siem Reap, and has the opportunity to pursue a sustainable path by learning from best and worst practices from neighbouring countries.

It is a long road ahead, but we hope that Cambodia will preserve its strong cultural heritage and natural beauty that make it such a distinctive and authentic country. Therefore, how the southern coast and beaches develop will be a good indication of the direction the country pursues with regards to sustainability.

It is of utmost importance to preserve famous sites such as the Angkor temples and to adopt sustainable ways to manage the tourist flow. The Angkor Tourism Management Plan, supervised by the UNESCO and the APSARA local authority, is providing new solutions.

Are tourists increasingly interested in sustainable tour programmes when they visit



Cambodia? What do they like?

Yes. Some of our clients want to support Cambodia's development in a sustainable way, where the money they spend goes directly to the local communities and not to an internationally managed hotel or shop.

Travellers sometimes request for social interaction within their itinerary, such as dining at a training restaurant for disadvantaged youths or getting a massage from

a blind masseur. Occasionally we also receive requests for half-, full- or multi-day projects such as assisting in digging wells or building houses.

Exotissimo has phased out all school and orphanage visits, as we believe that it is not appropriate to consider such venues as tourist attractions.

What sustainable tourism products do you hope to see more of in Cambodia, and why?

More proper homestays and certified eco-lodges can benefit travellers and the local communities if done well. We would like to see more hotels powered by solar panels, biomass or renewable energy sources.

We also welcome initiatives from individuals or NGOs to develop quality attractions while protecting the environment and educating the population on sustainable issues.

Cambodia should tap its fauna and flora by developing interpretation trails of its natural heritage to promote tourism. For

instance, the sustainable cultural centre in Rattanakiri's Banlung showcases and preserves the cultural diversity of Cambodia's indigenous populations.

What do you hope to achieve in the area of sustainable tourism in 2013?

Exo Foundation, our charitable arm, seeks to support responsible tourism projects and NGOs in the region. Exotissimo is a major donor, giving US\$1 per traveller out of its profits.

Exotissimo is currently developing a responsible travel policy, and one of our first objectives is to undertake the EarthCheck assessment programme in our Phnom Penh office. Whenever possible, Exotissimo is committed to selecting sustainable tourism suppliers.

One of our main goals is to increase the length of visitors' stay in Cambodia and bring them to other parts of the country so that more provinces can benefit from tourism. – Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

Vietnam Guilhem Cavallé, products and marketing manager, Handspan Travel

How sustainable is Vietnam in terms of tourism?

There is a positive trend but the level of tourism sustainability is still pretty low. Vietnam experienced rapid tourism growth at a time when there was a clear lack of experience and expertise in both tourism and sustainable development. Older tourism spots were developed without consideration for sustainability. In the last 10-15 years, some have suffered irreversible environmental and socio-economic degradation. The more recent developments have benefitted from greater expertise.

More farmers are giving up their fields to invest in tourism, but these decisions are made without a global vision of the industry. There is a risk of potential instability in the industry.

So far, developed destinations where entire communities rely on tourism alone still draw a steady flow of travellers that support the local economy. The number of tourists in Vietnam is still growing every year, but a sudden slowdown in arrivals to Vietnam or to a particular destination due to the emergence of new ones could bankrupt a bunch of businesses without any social or economic back-up.

Are tourists increasingly interested in sustainable tour programmes when they visit Vietnam? What do they like?

Very few tourists are genuinely interested in the sustainable aspects of a programme. Very few know Vietnam well enough to assess the sustainability of a tour.

More and more travellers are interested in getting far away from the crowds and this opens a window to the creation of new destinations, which in turn presents a unique opportunity to better manage the next phase of development.

Many people are interested in outdoor activities, cultural interaction, local life experiences, etc. Community-based tourism is getting more and more attractive. This has created opportunities for the development of responsible tourism. But what impact will these tours have on these communities if they are not controlled and balanced?

We hope to get a sustainability certification system here – probably not in 2013, but soon. If no certification is implemented, we may just create one (ourselves). Having local certification is an essential step towards a more sustainable industry.

What sustainable tourism products do you hope to see more of in Vietnam, and why?

First and foremost, we'd like to see more sustainable cruises/tours in Halong Bay because the ecosystem is dying, the social situation of "floating communities" is terrible and the destination has been grossly



As Vietnam's top destination, Halong Bay is in danger of overexploitation

overexploited. As a result, the experience offered to travellers has also declined.

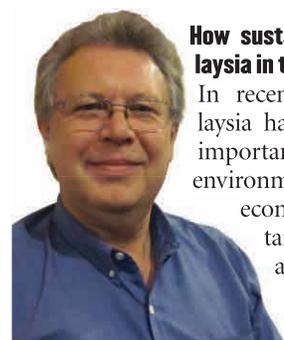
What do you hope to achieve in the area of sustainable tourism in 2013?

We will work on promoting alternative destinations where very few tourists visit. In some of these, we are the exclusive operator. All our tours to these places are community-supportive. They all focus on human-powered outdoor activities

such as bicycle tours and kayaking trips, and on raising ecological consciousness. These programmes are all sustainable, but as they are not mentioned in guidebooks or Internet forums, tourists seem to have a hard time trusting us to take them on those tours.

We will also renew some of our tours to improve their sustainable performance. City tours are top of our list. – Thomas Stewart

Malaysia Manfred Kurz, managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia



How sustainable is Malaysia in tourism?

In recent years, Malaysia has realised the importance of being environmentally and economically sustainable to stay attractive to visitors. It has launched many initiatives such as homestay programmes,

limiting the number of visitors to nature-based attractions, setting up national parks to educate visitors on endangered

species and encouraging hotels to implement green practices. Local tour guide associations have also taken positive steps to provide continuous training programmes on sustainable and green practices.

Are tourists increasingly interested in sustainable tour programmes when they visit Malaysia? What do they like?

European tourists are now seeking in-depth experiences, such as getting in touch with the local community, venturing deeper into the Malaysian jungles and visiting national parks. They have also become more conscious of the frail state of the environment, so when they visit, they

try...not to spoil the environment.

We receive more questions than ever on indigenous communities and endangered species. The demand for green hotels and resorts is also rising.

What sustainable tourism products do you hope to see more of in Malaysia, and why?

Local communities must learn to preserve their cultures and how they can play a part in tourism, while the government must take the lead in paving the way forward towards sustainable tourism. Only then will tour operators, hotels and other tourism players follow suit. A lot more work has to be done in preserving Malaysia's fauna

and flora, and ensuring sustainable livelihoods of the indigenous people, especially in Sabah and Sarawak.

What do you hope to achieve in the area of sustainable tourism in 2013?

In Sarawak, we have adopted an Iban tribe longhouse and we assist them in their daily lives; tourists are properly briefed about the dos and don'ts and are taught to behave like a house guest, not an intruder. We are now looking at adopting another longhouse in Sarawak, and developing itineraries for niche sectors such as bird-watching and photo safaris. – S Puvaneswary



Special ITB Supplement

Indonesia – a “tourism giant”, says Accor

Indonesia's largest hotel group, Accor, is predicting that Indonesia will soon be recognised as one of the “giants” of world tourism.



“Accor is marketing the whole country to European and other tourists emphasising the historical, cultural and natural attractions”

Michael Issenberg
Accor Asia Pacific Chairman and Chief Operating Officer

Accor Asia Pacific Chairman and COO, Michael Issenberg, said it was fitting that Indonesia had been appointed as the first Asian Official Partner Country of ITB, and that the honour would place focus on Indonesia not just as an outstanding destination, but also as a major source of outbound tourism for Asia and, increasingly, the rest of the world.

“If you look at the figures, Indonesia has been a powerhouse of Asia Pacific’s tourism sector for well over a decade, without possibly receiving the recognition it deserves,” said Issenberg.

“Indonesia is far more than just Bali, as Accor highlights with a network of almost 60 hotels in more than 30 different locations, and with a further 40 hotels scheduled to open by 2016.

“Last year, the highlight of our expansion was the launch of two outstanding Pullman hotels in Jakarta, and this year we will cement our leading position in Bali with the opening of a state-of-the-art Sofitel in Nusa Dua. It will be our 13th hotel on the island, though unlike other hotel groups we offer a complete range of product, from luxury through to economy, to ensure we cater for every market.”



Accor is expanding rapidly in Indonesia, with a new Sofitel joining a wide range of hotels in Bali, including Novotel Bali Benoa (pictured above)

Scheduled to open in September 2013, Sofitel Bali Nusa Dua Beach Resort will be a lavish beachfront retreat in BTDC Nusa Dua, one of the island’s most affluent addresses. The Sofitel will have 415 rooms including 17 private villas (all with water views), built around a series of infinity pools and just steps away from the sandy beaches of the Bali Sea.

The hotel will also have a ballroom, five meeting rooms, a multi-function room, three restaurants, a bar and lounge plus wellness facilities.

However, Issenberg stressed that Accor is marketing the whole country to European and other

tourists emphasising the historical, cultural and natural attractions of many of its other Indonesian destinations.

“We see great tourism potential in destinations such as Lombok, Manado, Bogor and Yogyakarta, and with Indonesia’s economy one of the strongest in the Asia Pacific region, we are working on building the business travel and meetings sectors. In particular, we believe that with newly launched hotels such as our two Pullmans in Jakarta we can significantly build the capital’s reputation as one of the leading convention destinations.”

Issenberg said that Accor’s

strategy of targeting all sectors of the hotel market had paid dividends, particularly as Indonesia and neighbouring countries had created a vast market of local travellers requiring quality international hotel product in the economy and mid-market sectors.

“Our Ibis brand has been one of the most pioneering economy hotel brands in the region, and now that we are also able to offer Ibis Styles and Ibis Budget as well, we are very optimistic about future growth across Indonesia.”

Issenberg said Accor would debut in a number of new Indonesian cities this year, including Makassar, Palu and Serpong.

ACCOR’S LEAN, GREEN ITB MACHINE



Accor is claiming one of the “greenest” ITB stands, in line with the company’s commitment to sustainability through the innovative Planet 21 programme.

Promoting sustainable building, Accor’s eco-friendly ITB booth contains recyclable materials, energy efficient lighting and represents biodiversity through a “living wall” symbolising the group’s commitment to its Planet for the Planet reforestation project. Over two million

trees have been planted since 2008 as a result of the Plant for the Planet project, with many of the plantations in the Asia Pacific region.

Planet 21 is considered one of the industry’s bench-setting sustainability programmes, incorporating not only environmental targets for Accor’s hotels – such as a 10% reduction in carbon emissions and energy use – but also a number of Community Social Responsibility

projects. For instance, Planet 21 has championed the eradication of child sex tourism as well as encouraging the employment and career development of indigenous Australians in the hotel industry.

There are now more than 600 environmentally-certified hotels across the Accor network, while only hotels that meet the group’s strict environmental and CSR requirements are eligible for Planet 21 accreditation.

Pullman to Make Splash in Phuket

THAILAND The new Pullman Arcadia Resort in Phuket is promising something quite extraordinary – the combination of easy proximity to the international airport (just 15 minutes) and yet almost complete serenity.

The exotic resort is perched spectacularly above Naithorn Beach, providing beautiful vistas of the unspoilt western coastline of Phuket. It’s expected to open next month.

The key selling point is that you can be in luxury and tranquillity not long after landing at Phuket, while other visitors are spending another 30 minutes to an hour fighting the legendary traffic jams before arriving – stressed-out – at their hotels.

The whole resort’s theme is tranquillity, with cascading waters a feature of the reception area, rooms and dining.

Sweeping views are available throughout the hotel, while the swimming pools, spa centre and chill-out areas provide the perfect tonic for those who value relaxation.

Local Thai artist Supachai Ketkaroonkul has added a distinctive Thai touch to Pullman’s cosmopolitan style.

For those who want to combine a chill-out holiday with excursions to Phuket’s busier locations, the Pullman offers ‘Art in Motion’ tuk tuks that look as good as they drive.

The 277 room Pullman offers large scale function areas for conferences and events, and with the hotel’s ease of access from the airport, there has been large-scale interest from the MICE market.

It is the fourth Pullman in Thailand, joining two Pullmans in Bangkok and another in Pattaya.

Pullman makes its mark

Accor's Pullman brand is setting the pace for 5-star hotels in Asia Pacific, with the brand already establishing itself as Australia's largest upscale brand. In Australia, Pullman took over from Hilton as the leading 5-star network, despite Pullman having debuted just over four years ago, compared to Hilton's almost four decades in the country.

Pullman is in the process of re-launching three major hotels in Sydney (the former Sydney Marriott), Brisbane and Melbourne (both former SeBELs), which are

being renovated at a cost of over US\$35 million. The refurbishments involve all rooms, public areas and conference facilities, with signature Pullman Lounges created in all three hotels.

Pullman is also making its mark in resort areas with stylish resorts launched in North Queensland's Palm Cove and Port Douglas and Western Australia's famous wine region of Margaret River.

The expansion in Australia mirrors the rapid growth of the brand in Asia. One of the most

stylish resorts in Thailand – Pullman Phuket Arcadia – is set to open (see p1), and this follows the opening of the first Pullman in Vietnam, Pullman Hanoi Horizon, which opened after a massive upgrade of the Horizon Hotel.

China currently boasts the largest network of Pullmans of any country in the world, with 15 open. Over the next three years the network is scheduled to grow to over 40 hotels with openings in all the first-tier cities as well as many of the regional centres.

India celebrated the opening of its first Pullman last year in Gurgaon (New Delhi), while Indonesia added two prime Pullman hotels in Jakarta to its highly-regarded Bali resort.

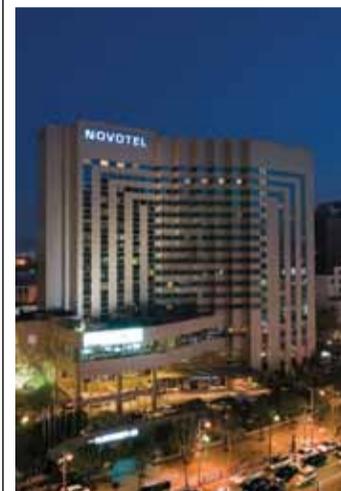
Asia Pacific has taken the lead for Pullman development, but Accor is also putting emphasis on its European growth, with the first UK hotel being launched at St Pancras, and five Pullmans in Paris undergoing complete refurbishments and scheduled for unveiling over the next year.



Pullman is expanding rapidly both in resort areas – Pullman Phuket Arcadia (pictured left) – and in city areas, with Pullman Brisbane King George Square (right) unveiling its new lobby design later this month

Briefs

Novotel Gangnam Style



The Novotel Ambassador Gangnam Seoul has been a pacesetter hotel in the fashionable district for almost two decades, but it has now attracted a whole new audience following the popularity of Psy's YouTube sensation 'Gangnam Style'. The Novotel is the ideal base to explore popular tourist attractions in Gangnam such as COEX Mall and Bongeunsa Temple.

MGallery for Palm Cove



After undergoing a major refurbishment, the award-winning Reef House Resort & Spa in north Queensland's Palm Cove, will become part of Accor's exclusive MGallery Collection. Originally built as a family residence in 1958, the elegant 69-room resort boasts beach frontage overlooking the Coral Sea and is set amongst lush tropical gardens, fragrant frangipanis, three sprawling swimming pools and 300-year-old Melaleuca trees.

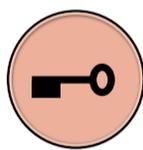
Sebel Apartment Brand



After acquiring the well-established Sebel brand last year, Accor will use the brand for its premium range of apartment-style properties in Australia and New Zealand. Sebel is based in most of Australia's major cities as well as many resort locations. Accor is developing new concepts for the brand to highlight its position as the region's only internationally managed brand of premium apartment hotels.

Checking In

Bangkok's boutique masterpiece



Boutique and bold are the hallmarks

of Accor's new MGallery hotel in Bangkok. *Ginnifer Ryan* checks in

LOCATION After a long day of shopping Bangkok's strip of malls that begins at MBK and ends up at Siam, I was transported into another world on arrival at Hotel Muse Bangkok Langsuan, in just one stop on the BTS. The hotel offers exceptional views of the city centre from The Speakeasy bar and roof-top lawn crowned with five private air-conditioned dome-like cupolas which ooze cosmopolitan chic – perfect for escaping the heat with a refreshing beverage.

FACILITIES Don't miss the outdoor swimming pool where you can take a dip with an amazing view. The spa and fitness centre will help you find ways to relax. Business travellers will also welcome the high-speed Wi-Fi and luxurious work desk from a bygone era with intricate carv-

ings and little wooden drawers. There's also a number of indoor/outdoor venues for meetings and private dinners.

SERVICE Expect a warm yet personalised Thai welcome. Staff are attentive and only too happy to recommend new places to shop, eat and see in the local area. There's a sense of Asian glamour as a couple looking like they've just come from a magazine shoot step out of their yellow Lamborghini and into the hotel for a night out.

F&B Downstairs from reception a winding staircase will lead you to stylish Medici Kitchen & Bar for Italian fare. Wine barrels line the walls and make for an intimate affair or sit along the high bench for glimpses into the bustling kitchen. The dining experience at Medici was heightened with Thai opera singers belting out masterpieces from the original three tenors. Like it hot? Then you can't go past time-honoured Thai dishes at Su Tha Ros on the 19th floor with dazzling views. For a rooftop experience, The Speakeasy covering the entire 24th and 25th floors is a must - it's hard to go anywhere else. For those inclined, the plush cigar lounge provides smoking jackets for guests.

ROOMS Hotel Muse effort-



lessly blends the opulence of Thailand's golden age of travel with European influences woven into the interiors, art and design. Wrought iron, wooden panelling, low lighting and black marble bathrooms juxtaposed with ornate Asian motifs are stand-out features of the hotel's timeless decor. Rooms are spacious and some of the suites have a balcony big enough to host your own party. Rooms on the top six floors offer espresso coffee machines and Molton Brown toiletries. And the beds are heavenly.

VERDICT For boutique style and 5-star service, Hotel Muse

has everything you need. It's a newly built hotel with understated elegance and sophistication. If you're after Bangkok's hidden gem to get away from it all, you've found it.

Name Hotel Muse Bangkok Langsuan – MGallery Collection

No of rooms 174

Contact Tel (+666)2/6304000

Mail H7174@accor.com

Web www.mgallery.com

Ibis brings style to economy sector

When Ibis first launched in Asia Pacific in the early 1990s, the concept totally changed the way people considered economy hotels. Instead of variable standards and tired facilities, the brand offered fresh, contemporary accommodation, with a global guarantee of quality.

The brand is just about to reach the 200 mark in Asia Pacific, with over 1600 Ibis hotels around the world, made up of Ibis, Ibis Styles and Ibis Budget hotels.

New Ibis hotels in Singapore and Hong Kong have highlighted the innovation that has taken place in the brand over recent years, but it is the new Ibis Styles label that is creating the greatest attention at the moment.

While generally thought of as a city brand, Ibis Styles shows that the brand also has serious resort credentials.

Ibis Styles Bali Benoa has become a top product for the leisure traveller looking for “style at a great price”, while Ibis Styles Kuta Circle’s duplex family rooms are a unique selling point of this hotel.

These two Ibis Styles hotels are perfect examples of where the brand is heading, with bright, colourful decor and a modular design that gives a big impact for a small price. Modern, clean and simple lines create a relaxed vibe for guests while splashes of colour bring a sense of fun. A similar de-



Ibis Styles Fraser Park, Kuala Lumpur

sign concept has been showcased at the new Ibis Styles Kuala Lumpur and at the Ibis Styles London Excel.

With a strong portfolio of hotels in the network, Accor is already looking ahead to the brand’s future. In Australia, renowned designers Elsie & Betty have been hired to develop new interior concepts for Australian Ibis Styles properties. They have created new design concepts for each hotel style, depending on their location – whether city, coastal or regional. The common design direction for each is a trendy, bright look that will provide guests with sense of

fun and creativity.

The city design brief uses simple geometric shapes and bold colours to reflect the brightness and excitement of the urban environment; the coastal design features a calm seaside palette with smooth and textured surfaces to provide a relaxed seaside feel; while the regional design uses warm, earthy colours and natural finishes to reference the natural environment.

Malaysia will see three new Ibis Styles hotels open this year, with properties opening in Ipoh, Kota Kinabalu and Lahad Datu, with Ibis Styles Johor Bahru opening in 2014.

SOFITEL’S DESIGNER FOCUS

Christian Lacroix helped to elevate Sofitel So Bangkok to one of the world’s most exciting openings in 2012, and now Germany’s Karl Lagerfeld has been appointed by Sofitel So Singapore as their “Signature Designer”.

It continues a strong association with design for the Sofitel brand. The exciting Sofitel Vienna utilised the talents of Jean Nouvel, while Kenzo Takada provided design direction at Sofitel So Mauritius.

Given that Accor’s HQ for Asia Pacific is in Singapore, the development of the Sofitel So is particularly significant. The hotel boasts a prime position at 35 Robinson Road, and is being developed out of a 1927 heritage building that will retain its neo-classical facade and some of the existing building structures, while a newer five-storey wing is constructed at the back.

The luxury hotel will feature 134 rooms including 23 suites, each uniquely designed to pre-

serve the building’s heritage while representing modern Singapore. The property is scheduled to open mid-2013, and will feature a striking interior designed by the renowned Miaja Design Group.

Sofitel CEO Robert Gaymer-Jones said this was only the third Sofitel So commissioned and that the brand was reserved for exceptional hotels, with exceptional design in exceptional locations.

“Sofitel So is our ‘designer hotel’ label featuring trendy hotels in contemporary locations, with a focus on the destination. Reflecting a strong flare for design, each Sofitel So hotel combines the iconic Sofitel “art de vivre” with the signature of an international designer from the worlds of fashion or art to present the best of the location.”

Sofitel will launch in Bali’s Nusa Dua this year, while there are two other major Sofitels under development in the New Zealand capital, Wellington, and China’s Shenyang.



Sofitel So Singapore

ibis.com
accorhotels.com

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Today, ibis has become one big, happy family composed of ibis hotels, ibis Styles and ibis budget hotels.

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BRAND NEW IBIS, BRAND NEW COMFORT.

Mercure earns its stripes

Accor might be showcasing its Sofitel, Pullman and MGallery hotels around Asia Pacific, but one of its largest and most established mid-market brands has also been kicking goals in recent years, with a whole new design philosophy and some major new openings.

In Australia, Mercure Brisbane has just been re-launched after the renovation of all its rooms, and it follows equally substantial makeovers of Mercure Melbourne Treasury Gardens and Mercure Sydney.

The bold new look boasts strong personality, while

providing a quality sleep experience.

In Asia, there are signature new Mercure hotels in both Jakarta and Bangkok.

The idea of Accor’s Mercure brand is to champion local features while also providing contemporary international facilities and services. So the new Mercure Jakarta Simatupang features exceptional local modern art, while also providing an attractive roof top pool and lounge bar, mini golf facilities, free wifi in all areas, a fitness centre, in-room spa treatments and 24-hour room service.

Also with a roof top pool, and stylish contemporary design, is Mercure Bangkok Siam, which boasts one of the best locations in the city opposite popular MBK shopping centre and next to the BTS National Stadium skytrain station.

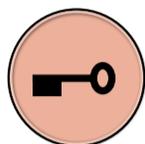
Mercure has significant growth plans for both Indonesia and Vietnam. In the next two years, there will be new Mercure hotels in Bandung, Palu, Serpong, Bali, Samarinda and Jakarta, while in Vietnam the brand will open hotels in Sam Son, Danang, Hanoi and Sapa.



Mercure Jakarta Simatupang

Checking In

Pullman Quay Grand Sydney Harbour



For an iconic Sydney experience, you can't get much better than this, says *Billie Griffin*

LOCATION It was my first time in Sydney and I wanted a hotel that was close to everything and took in all of the city's iconic landscapes – the bridge, the harbour, the Opera House – and Pullman Quay Grand Sydney Harbour served it all on a platter. Located right next to the city's main ferry terminal Circular Quay, I had Sydney Harbour at my doorstep. The rest of the CBD was just south of the hotel – an easy 10 minute walk up the road. If I wanted to venture further, the Circular Quay train station (and ferry terminal) was only a few steps away from the hotel – everything was so accessible.

ROOMS The best thing about the hotel is the spaciousness of the rooms, and every one had its own balcony with either a view of



the harbour or the Botanical Gardens. Winding down after a day's work on the balcony watching the sun set over the Sydney Harbour Bridge was something I'll never forget – even if I was in town for business! My one-bedroom suite had its own gourmet kitchen, laundry, separate lounge and dining area, work desk and wireless internet which I found to be very convenient.

DINING I enjoyed a pre-dinner Champagne at the hotel's newly redecorated ECQ Bar which is encased by glass and looks directly over Sydney Harbour. The bar serves a substantial dinner menu, however we opted to go to the hotel's fine dining Quadrant Restaurant which was more conducive for a business dinner. The fare was modern Australian with some incredibly fresh seafood the highlight (not to mention the signature Pullman Taittinger champagne). The restaurant is also where breakfast is served.

FACILITIES I was pleasantly surprised to learn the hotel offers valet grocery and shopping services, ideal for long-stay guests. The daily housekeeping service was welcomed as was the 24-hour room service menu. I regularly

Name Pullman Quay Grand Sydney Harbour

No of rooms 69

Contact Tel +61 2 9256 4000

Web www.pullmanhotels.com

used the gym and took advantage of cool, crisp mornings to jog in the wonderful waterside gardens just across the road. The hotel also has an indoor heated swimming pool and spa.

SERVICE I found the service to be very attentive and friendly and check-in and check-out was quick and efficient. I made use of the 24-hour concierge service when I needed to organise a driver for a client the following morning and it all happened seamlessly. The concierge also recommended a great show to see at the Sydney Opera House.

VERDICT This has to be one of the best-positioned hotels in Sydney and is well suited for both corporate and leisure travellers, with its proximity to the CBD, its 5-star comforts and the amazing views. According to Accor, Pullman is their 'upscale business brand' and I found the hotel lived up to expectations.

India expansion gathers speed

Accor made two highly strategic openings in India during the 2012, with the first Sofitel opening in Mumbai and the first Pullman in New Delhi's Gurgaon.

It brought the Accor network to 19 hotels, while a further 50 hotels are planned for India in the next five years, with its Novotel and customised Ibis brands leading the way.

The Sofitel has had an immediate impact in the market. The hotel boasts a prime location in the geographical heart of Mumbai – the Bandra Kurla Complex. The hotel attracts a wide cross section of guests, with corporate travellers and conference groups taking advantage of the hotel's location in the heart of the business district, while tourists appreciate the serenity of the hotel, the health and leisure facilities, and the range of restaurants, with Tuskers vegetarian restaurant already one of the city's most highly rated.

Pullman Gurgaon Central Park has become a popular hotel for

European tourists because of the hotel's easy access to both the airport and Agra, while the nearby train station offers an easy 25 minute transfer into central Delhi. A striking lobby with a magnificent water feature greets guests and all 285 rooms offer the signature Pullman bed, iPod docking station and complimentary WiFi.

The hotel offers guests an extensive range of food and beverage options, indoor and outdoor banqueting areas, and a wellness zone with a state-of-the-art fitness lounge, outdoor heated pool, Monsoon Salon and Mandara Spa.

Accor will make significant openings at Delhi Airport over the next 18 months, with an Ibis opening followed by a Novotel and Pullman. Accor will also debut in the holiday destination of Goa, with a Novotel Resort scheduled to open, followed by a Grand Mercure. There will also be significant expansion of Ibis and Formule 1 across the country.



Pullman Gurgaon Central Park

European markets surge for Accor Asia

A resurgence in European outbound travel is fuelling growth for Accor's Asian hotels. *Peter Tavaré* reports.

Forward bookings for major destinations in Asia are looking very encouraging for 2013, says Accor, fuelled by a resurgence in Europe's key outbound markets.

Accor Senior Vice President Sales, Marketing & Distribution, Graham Wilson, said that city destinations such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangkok and Hanoi, and resorts including Phuket and Bali, were on track to record solid growth in bookings from Europe, particularly from France, Germany and Russia.

"We have seen European growth of 8% in many destinations, and with new product and continued growth in affordable air access from Europe, we expect this trend to continue for the French and German markets where Accor's hotel brands are so well known and trusted, especially Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure and Ibis. This is particularly important for the less experienced travellers, who like the certainty of well-regarded European-branded hotels.

"Our brands have evolved significantly in Asia, building on their European heritage, and the market

has come to recognise them for offering outstanding quality and value for money."

Wilson said that with new Pullman and Novotel hotels in Phuket, they were anticipating a record year of growth for European travel to the Thai resort, while the addition of a Pullman hotel in Hanoi and a Novotel in Ho Chi Minh City gave the group the largest coverage of hotels in Vietnam.

"We recorded over 20% increase in European business into Vietnam and we expect that to grow even further this year," he said. "It is a peak destination with an incredible combination of natural, cultural and historic attractions," said Mr Wilson.

"Indonesia is also looking very promising, with increased flights to Jakarta out of London, and with the country's tourism offering maturing impressively.

"Singapore will continue to be a crucial hub for European visitors, which makes the opening of the Sofitel So Bangkok so strategic. It will be one of the city's premier 5-star hotels."



Thailand has seen massive growth in European business, with Sofitel So Bangkok (above) a popular choice