



ITB Berlin, Germany
March 7, 2013

Jump in stop sales

European wholesale model challenged by rising Asian market, new distribution

By Raini Hamdi

GERMAN and Swiss tour operators are reporting a huge spike in stop sale notices, particularly from Thai beach resorts, which they say is hindering growth.

“While in the past, there were between two and five stop sale mails received daily, this has now increased to 12-25 daily notices, presently covering the months of March to August,” said Luzi Matzig, group CEO of Asian Trails, who confirmed both Hotelplan and Kuoni Switzerland were seeing this.

Wettstein’s product director Asia, Africa, Latin America, Christoph Infanger, said he was receiving at least thrice as many stop sales now, not only for, but particularly, Thailand, despite the Swiss market being stable



Infanger: “We’re closed out.”

overall. “We could still generate more business but are closed out,” he said.

Some German tour operators, too, are getting more stop sales despite strong growth. Marco Polo Reisen’s managing director, Holger Baldus, said for the first time ever, there was even “overbooking” in Hoi An, Vietnam. UK operators however said they did not notice changes beyond the usual festive periods.

The rise of Asian and other emerging markets such as Russia and Scandinavia, new ways to distribute and maximise stock, and limited supply are chief reasons. In Thailand, Phuket, Khao Lak, Pattaya, Samui and Krabi are said to be strong hotel markets, whereas places like Bangkok

see few stop sales as there is sufficient capacity.

But Baldus warned that clients were starting to feedback poorer quality of service and “rundown rooms” in some four and four-and-a-half star Thai hotels.

Offering a hotelier’s perspective, Centara Hotels & Resorts’ SVP sales and marketing, Chris Bailey, said the big issue was European wholesalers had to keep prices down, especially in today’s financial climate, but there was only so much supply of lowest category room types.

“Often, the complaints come because lowest room type is closed yet others are all wide open. They need to work on their ability to up sell. This is where OTAs score over operators as they will sell what rooms there

are available and at rates hotels want to sell at,” Bailey said.

“The German market grew 40 per cent for us last year, yet I still got complaints about stop sales. My argument is you cannot grow your business by this amount and not face stop sales on premium travel dates or the



Bailey: you got to scale up

lowest category room types where inventory is limited – the room can only be sold once!” he added.

XML was the way to go – everyone could see and access available inventory – rather than giving allocations to operators, hoping it would fill and not knowing until rooming lists were received, said Bailey.

“In today’s marketplace this business model does not work anymore.”



Sweet Accor

Markets evolve. But we never expected this to impact French macarons.

Accor Asia-Pacific has launched an Indonesia-centric brand, Maha Cipta (see page 2), to cater better to the huge domestic market. The devil’s in the detail, so macarons will have local flavours: ginger, jackfruit, even durian – oh là là, we’re not sure how that would go down with international travellers.

Accor macarons, anyone?

The journalist instinct in us says Bangkok Airways’ planned IPO will most likely happen in June.

The airline cancelled its press briefing scheduled today – could it be because its advisers are prohibiting interviews of any angle as it might affect listing procedures? The company reportedly aims to sell around 40 per cent of the airline, ending 44 years of private ownership.

Phil dances as ICAO lifts ban

By Raini Hamdi

PHILIPPINE operators could not have a better start to ITB than with the news that the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is lifting its air safety concerns on the country, a ban which has vastly affected its longhaul market growth.

“I’m somersaulting all the way to Manila,” said Marsman Drysdale Travel’s director of tourism services, Eleanor Ng.

For three years, the ban has been curtailing tour/beach programmes in the Philippines as its no-insurance cover on domestic flights keeps the big European tour operators at bay.

Marie Venus Q Tan, Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) director West, Central & Eastern Europe, explained: “All the European big tour operators, have strict corporate policies and the ban curtailed their marketing initiatives for the Philippines.”

Added Marsman Drysdale’s Ng: “European tour operators were most affected by the ban since it limited their programme to only one location, say, Luzon, and deterred them from combining it with a beach – Boracay,

Cebu, Bohol – which meant flying domestically.

“I expect the combinations to start again, at least for the next winter season,” Ng said.

The ban lift also comes on the heels of high expectations that the Senate will remove heavy carrier taxes which have costed the Philippines direct European flights, with the last airline stand-

“It’s really fun now.”

Cesar R Cruz

President/GM of TRIPS Travel and president, Philtoa

ing, KLM, pulling out its non-stop services in April last year.

At the same time, more than 14,000 new rooms will open by 2014, likewise a slew of new international airports, including Legaspi (opening 2015 if not sooner) and Bohol, according to Susan del Mundo, marketing & promotions, Tourism Promotion Board.

The country’s new campaign, *More Fun in the Philippines*, is also “working”, said Cesar R. Cruz, president/GM of TRIPS

Travel and president, Philippine Tour Operators Association (Philtoa).

“Despite the ban, the European market has grown for us as we never stopped promoting and marketing the destination to Europe.

“If it had not been for the ban, we would probably have achieved 20 per cent growth instead of 10 per cent,” Cruz said.

DoT’s Tan said Europe grew 12 per cent last year over 2011. “We focused on European niches such as the dive market, which would come despite any ‘negative’ sentiments, and we did not pull out from major trade-shows,” she said, adding she expects her budget to be revised upwards as a result of the cap being removed.

Places such as Albay which, despite the ban, has been able to attract German visitors due to its ecotourism and adventure offerings, are expecting further windfalls.

Maria O Ravanilla, DoT regional director-Region 5, said of around 67,000 Germans who visited the Philippines last year, 17,000 went to Albay, located about an hour’s flight from Manila.

European demand to Sabah strong despite a few advisories

By S Puvaneswary

HOTELIERS and tour operators in the East Malaysian state of Sabah are still reporting strong inbound bookings, despite recent travel advisories issued by the UK and Australia following the standoff between the Filipino followers of the sultan of Sulu and Malaysian police forces.

“Sabah is not in the main news,” said David Carlow, head of faraway product at UK-based Premier Holidays. “FIT bookings to Sabah are selling well since we launched new promotions to Sabah last month.”

According to George Hong, general manager of Sabah-based Borneo Nature Tours, which operates the Borneo Rainforest Lodge, a 15-pax Swedish group had called off their stay in mid-March but the lodge had not received any cancellation from the UK, while enquiries and bookings from the European market were still coming in.

He added: “Our 31-room lodge is about 190 km from the village of Tandau – quite a distance from where the trouble is.”

Likewise, Susan Soong, assistant general manager of Borneo Eco Tours, which manages Su-

kau Rainforest Lodge resort, said: “We are still super busy. We have good bookings from Europe for the coming Easter holidays.

“Two FIT bookings from Sweden have postponed their travel this month to March 2014. Two FIT dive bookings from the UK to Langkayan have cancelled. We hope there will not be new cancellations. We are ready to change itineraries from the east coast of Sabah to the west coast on request.”

Noredah Othman, Sabah Tourism Board’s manager for Europe, remarked: “We know travellers are concerned over their safety, so we use our website to keep them informed and updated.”

At press time, Sabah Tourism Board’s website highlighted “business as usual” for Sabah, as island resorts and tourism activities on the east coast of Sabah are still operating in the various dive destinations of Sipadan, Mabul, Kapalai, Matakig, Pom Pom, Pandanan and Lankayan.

Over the past few years, the Malaysian government has also installed dedicated armed national security personnel at these destinations to ramp up safety.

In brief

Berlin hotels wave the pink flag
VISITBERLIN and the hotel industry in the German capital have come together to launch the pink pillow Berlin Collection, a new hotel network that are especially welcoming to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) guests. Including nhow Berlin, Grand Hotel Esplanade Berlin, Hotel Novotel Berlin Am Tiergarten, Radisson Blu Hotel Berlin and The Westin Grand Berlin Hotel, participating hotels have pledged their commitment to engage in LGBT social projects and offer information on the LGBT scene in Berlin.

Destination Asia to unveil new eDA
COME April, Destination Asia will roll out a new online booking engine, eDA, which will enable B2B users to book rooms, tours and transfers online round the clock, and confirm a reservation instantaneously. Fully secured to ensure total privacy, the system also allows users to complete multiple country bookings with a single PNR and also make additions and changes to itineraries.

New branding for OAM Hotels
OAM Hotels, operated by the Onyx Hospitality Group, has changed its name to The Mosaic Collection to reflect the diverse range of properties in its portfolio. Consisting of small- and medium-sized properties, current hotels in the collection range from a nature lodge in Thailand's far north to resorts in Pattaya.

Next up: Indonesia-centric hotel brand

Accor launches Maha Cipta, like Mei Jue in China

By Raini Hamdi

ACCOR Asia-Pacific has launched an Indonesia-centric brand, Grand Mercure Maha Cipta, even while it remains debatable if hotel chains need to come up with market-specific brands.

The first property which will embrace the Maha Cipta concept is the 483-room Grand Mercure Jakarta Harmoni, a new-build opening in a few months.

Just as it has done in China with the China-centric Grand Mercure Mei Jue, Maha Cipta is designed to appeal better to the huge Indonesian domestic market – a chief reason why chains are making a bee-line for the country (see page 23).

Its touch points include welcoming guests in Bahasa, along with a treat of durian- or jackfruit-flavoured French macarons. F&B restaurants feature local favourites alongside European cuisine. Spa treatments use local spices. Traditional music and dance performances, batik painting workshops, modern Indonesian art exhibitions will be staged.

“Over two decades (of Accor in Indonesia), we have developed a strong under-

standing of the Indonesian hotel industry and the unique characteristics of upscale travellers,” said Gerard Guillouet, Accor’s SVP for Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore.



Wilson: markets evolve

Graham Wilson, Accor’s SVP sales and marketing, said Maha Cipta would not alienate international guests: “In fact, there is a growing market of international travellers who want a more local experience. They might see it as Grand Mercure, but locals will relate better to Maha Cipta.”

Wilson said Mei Jue in China was successful, with the number of hotels doubling to 26 in the next three years. “Maha Cipta will be as successful,” he said.

“Markets evolve. There was no need for the upscale sector to adapt when travel was only by international and wealthy local travellers. But today, Indonesia has a middle-class that is growing rapidly in numbers and sophistication. They want an upscale product, but they also want an Indonesian flavour. It shows just how much the Indonesian market has progressed in the 20 years Accor has been operating in the country,” Wilson said.

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Accor said it was on track to operate 100 hotels in Indonesia by 2015. This year, it will open at least 19 new hotels, from budget to luxury, bringing the network to nearly 80 hotels in 23 Indonesian cities by end-2013.

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Asien steals the thunder

Indonesia is everywhere, Thailand's booming, there's more fun in the Philippines. **Patrick Tan** snaps away



Accor Asia-Pacific's Graham Wilson (centre) and his team are poised to lift the company to new heights (see page 2). Psst, it's Wilson's birthday today – many happy returns)



Park Hotel Group (PHG)'s Mohd K Rafin (centre) has a lot to celebrate, turning 60 years old last week and being promoted recently. With him are PHG Hong Kong's Pauline Cheung, PHG China's Grace Gao, Park Hotel Hong Kong's Peggy Lo and Park Hotel Clarke Quay Singapore's Dino Lim



Indonesia struts its stuff at ITB Berlin

Top left: Accor's Gerard Guillouet and Yann Caillere had a private audience with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono; top right: Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy's Sapta Nirwandar. Below: Indonesian Ministry of Tourism & Creative Economy's Agustini Rahayu (third from left), Esthy Reko Astuty, Sapta Nirwandar, Nia Niscaya and Molly Prabawaty



Macau Government Tourist Office's (MGTO) Christal Lei, MGTO Germany's Margit Schwarz, MGTO's Cora Vong Lai Kuan, MGTO Germany's Marina Noble and Veronika Bulowski, and Galaxy Entertainment Group Macau's Patrick San



Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) Somradee Chanchai, Bangkok Airways' Nandhika Varavarn, and TAT's Suraphon Svetasreni and Juthaporn Rerngronasa



Taiwan Visitors Association's Kuo-Fu Chi, Edison Travel Service (ETS) Taiwan's Peter Kuo, K&A International Taiwan's Kitty Wong and ETS Taiwan's Paul Hsieh



Bangkok Airways' Passapong Jirawattanasak, Andrew Hoskins, Varong Israsena, Chulin Kocharoen, Nandhika Varavarn, Ariya Prasarthong - Osoth, Plermpis Kosolutasarn and Kridhakorn Sirabhabhoj



The Howard Plaza Hotel Taipei's Amy Chen



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 Contest

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

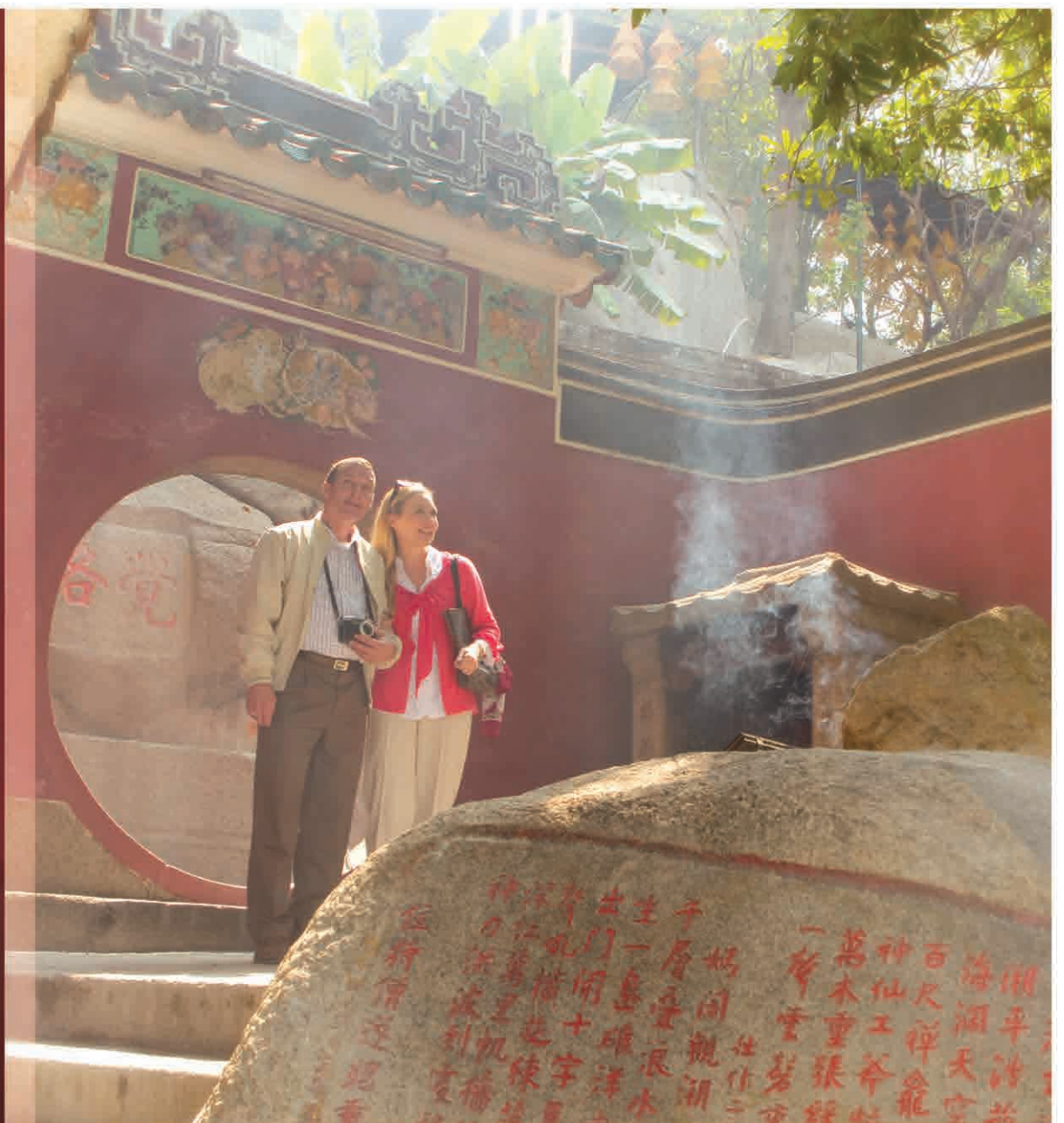
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Singapore stays strong

The eurozone crisis has not affected German-speaking travellers' interest in Singapore, as the city rolls out more attractions and hotels to keep its allure. Reports by **Linda Haden**



Haji Lane is a vibrant enclave in Singapore's Muslim quarter

Singapore remains high on the agenda for German-speaking travellers in spite of the precarious economic situation in the eurozone.

According to the data published by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), the number of arrivals from the three core German-speaking markets – namely Austria, Germany and Switzerland – had risen significantly in the first half of 2012. Austria recorded a 24.9 per cent hike, Germany climbed 24 per cent while Switzerland rose by 7.7 per cent.

Comparatively, the number of Austrian and German visitors from January to June 2011 grew by a paltry 1.6 per cent and 2.5 percent respectively, whereas the Swiss market jumped by a credible four per cent.

Shaun Casey, regional director Europe, Middle East and Africa, Pacific World is highly positive about the prospects for the German market in 2013 as the company has so far not experienced any discernable fallout in demand from Germany amid the eurozone crisis.

“2012 has been a very good year for Pacific World, and we are looking for this to continue in 2013. Currently, demand (from Germany) is generally doing well all over Asia. We are confident that the year ahead will continue to deliver business,” he said.

Inbound experts are also bullish about the Swiss market. “Overall the Swiss market is stable. For tour operators

working with us, there have been an increase from eight per cent to 18 per cent for the season ending October 31, 2012,” said Judy Lum, group vice president sales & marketing, Tour East Singapore.

She added: “Forward bookings may not increase month-on-month but we are hopeful that we will see an increase in bookings in the latter part of the year.”

She emphasised that the Swiss market continued to thrive owing to the relative stability and strength of the Swiss franc, and like Germany, Switzerland has not been impacted by the eurozone crisis.

Despite the relative strength of the German-speaking markets to other key European segments, several inbound experts pointed out that more needed to be done to draw German speakers to Singapore's shores.

Casey said: “A strong marketing and communications campaign may help to transmit key messages to people in (German-speaking) regions.”

Susanne Fraederich, general manager product management Asia, TUI Deutschland, called for more German-centric products and services to be developed in Singapore and other Asian destinations. She said: “From TUI's perspective, we would like more exclusiveness (for the German market) to enable the already-good quality to be further improved and to have a direct influence on the hotels that are offered to Germans.”

Strong start for Lion City in 2012

The number of international arrivals to Singapore in 1H2012 grew 11 per cent year-on-year to hit 7.1 million, based on latest figures from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB). All top ten source markets, with the exception of Thailand, the Philippines and the UK, posted significant increases, with China exhibiting the most pronounced jump over the previous year (29.1 per cent).

Despite the continual surge in visitor numbers into the country in the first half of 2012, Singapore was not completely immune to the adverse impacts of the economic conditions in Europe and the US. In the first half of 2011, tourism receipts grew by an impressive 32 per cent to S\$11 billion (US\$8.9 billion). Conversely, between January and June 2012, the growth rate in receipts slipped to seven per cent, with foreign visitors generating a total of S\$11.5 billion. Expenditure per head dropped by about five per cent to S\$1,619 between 1H2011 and 1H2012.

Singapore's tourism industry is expected to continue its growth through 2012, but at a much slower pace relative to 2011. At its annual tourism conference in March last year, the tourism bureau unveiled a forecast of S\$23-S\$24 billion in tourism receipts for 2012, a rise of about three to eight per cent, less than half the 17 per cent growth rate attained in 2011. STB also predicted 13.5 to 14.5 million visitor arrivals for 2012, which indicates a year-on-year growth of only 2.3 per cent compared to 13 per cent in 2011 when arrivals reached 13.2 million.

STB remains resolute in growing Singapore's share of the global tourism pie. Its current strategy to develop Singapore into

a quality destination is based on four tenets: sustaining a pipeline of original tourism experiences; renewing and rejuvenating the tourism landscape; harnessing the collective energies of Asia; and strengthening industry competitiveness through capabilities upgrading.

In order to achieve this premise, the government has set aside a war chest of S\$905 million for the next five years. This hefty budget is the second tranche of the Tourism Development Fund, which was established in 2005 with S\$2 billion to supplement targets set for 2015.

Last year, STB unveiled three new consumer-centric differentiated marketing campaigns. The first, unveiled in March, was aimed at Australians living in Sydney, Perth and Melbourne. Dubbed *Get Lost and Find the Real Singapore*, the quirky publicity blitz was designed to overturn Australians' negative perceptions of the island state. *The Holiday You Take Home With You* was launched in the same month to target Indians, showcasing four aspects of enriching experiences in Singapore – family fun, active lifestyle, culinary and romance.

A second phase was unveiled in November to entice Indian visitors to visit and re-visit Singapore.

The tourism bureau's third differentiated marketing campaign for the year, *Only in Singapore, Right Now!* was launched in November to target Indonesian FITs.

A tender was called by STB in early November for an attractions consumer insights study in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. The board also intends to assess Singapore's competitive edge in the attractions sector, amid the rising tide of

actual and proposed theme parks and attractions across the region.

Industry observers believed that the clutch of new attractions such as Gardens by the Bay, the Marine Life Park and River Safari would help fuel visitor arrival and expenditure growth this year despite mounting economic instability and intensifying competition.

While tourist arrivals had held up in the first half of 2012, inbound travel experts told the *Daily* that the second half of 2012 had been rather tumultuous, as fiscal weaknesses in Europe and the US continued to weigh down heavily on travel decisions and budgets.

“Singapore's strong currency has been particularly off-putting for regional leisure markets such as China and India. Not only are customers looking at other less expensive South-east Asian destinations such as Thailand, even Europe and the Caribbean now offer significantly better value than Singapore and some are actually choosing to head there instead,” said Yvonne Low, executive director, The Traveller DMC.

Tony Aw, assistant general manager (inbound), Hong Thai Travel Services, said: “Traffic from the markets we deal mainly with – including China, Hong Kong and Taiwan – are gradually reverting to less expensive regional destinations such as Thailand.”

He added: “There's also clear evidence that (leisure) visitors who do come to Singapore are now trimming costs, for instance by switching from four-star to two- and three-star properties, or by shortening their stay, just to make visiting Singapore much more affordable.”

Singapore Airlines will ramp up services to and from Copenhagen on March 31



Airlines | Ready for more takeoffs

In 2012, Changi Airport welcomed two passenger carriers, Scoot and Drukair, improving Singapore's connectivity with links to Australia's Gold Coast and Paro in Bhutan respectively.

Meanwhile, Indonesia's Mandala Airlines returned to Changi, while FireFly started flights to Malaysia's Kota Bharu and Hainan Airlines commenced services to Taiyuan in China's Shanxi.

THAI Smile, the premium low-cost hybrid of Thai Airways, is set to launch a daily Singapore-Phuket service in early 2013 once it takes delivery of two new 172-seat Airbus A320s to compete with Jetstar, Thai AirAsia and Tiger Airways.

After a four-year hiatus, Swiss International Air Lines will return to Singapore

Hotels | Expansion in the mid-scale sector

The Lion City will receive an influx of 2,972 rooms across 12 new properties in 2013, which is expected to bolster capacity marginally in the city's undersupplied hotel sector.

Anticipating the new properties, Tony Cousens, general manager, Days Hotel and Ramada Singapore Zhongshan Park, said: "Despite the apparent sizeable influx of rooms in Singapore this year, I am bullish about the (hotel) sector's prospects."

"Singapore's tourism arrivals are expected to remain buoyant in the mid-term, and this means that hotels, particularly those operating in the undersupplied mid-tier and economy segments, will continue to reap significant (financial) rewards."

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts made its inaugural entrance in Singapore with the 405-key Days Hotel Singapore and the 384-key Ramada Hotel Singapore – both located at Zhongshan Park in Balestier on the fringe of the city centre. The economy Days Hotel kicked off operations on January 1 this year, while the mid-tier Ramada welcomed its first guests on March 1.

InterContinental Hotels Group's mid-scale Holiday Inn Express brand will debut in Singapore in 3Q2013 with a 220-key property on Orchard Road and a 400-key property in Clarke Quay.

Accor's Sofitel So is also set to make its first appearance in Singapore on July 1 when the 134-room luxury boutique hotel opens in a heritage building in the CBD.

Starwood's Westin, which exited from Singapore in 2002, will make its comeback

on November 1 as the 301-key Westin Singapore Marina Bay, occupying the 32nd to 46th floors of Asia Square Tower 2.

Far East Hospitality's 37-room upscale boutique hotel, The Amoy, is scheduled for a 1H2013 opening in Chinatown's Telok Ayer Street.

The 386-room Carlton City Hotel Singapore, due to open in mid-2013 in Tanjong Pagar, will be marketed as an interna-

tional business hotel.

Meanwhile, the luxury 250-room One Farrer Hotel & Spa will open in 3Q2013 within an integrated healthcare complex.

In eastern Singapore, the 4.2-hectare Changi Cove will open in the first half of 2013 with 135 mid-scale rooms and a convention centre while Aqueen Hotel Paya Lebar, a 160-room economy hotel, did not have an exact date for its 2013 opening at



Artist's impression of Sofitel So Singapore

press time. Also poised for a 2013 opening is the 180-key Pan Pacific Serviced Suites Beach Road.



Changi Airport with a daily Zurich-Singapore service on May 12 using 219-seat A340 aircraft. Air France will introduce its fourth weekly A380 operation with 516 seats on the Paris-Singapore route in summer 2013.

Following regulatory approval for a joint venture with Scandinavian Airlines in May last year, Singapore Airlines (SIA) will ramp up services between Singapore and Copenhagen from three weekly flights to five on March 31. Each Boeing 777-200ER aircraft offers 266 seats, which is expected to boost one-way capacity by as much as 67 per cent.

SIA will hike frequency on its Singapore-Adelaide route from 10 to 12 weekly flights on 471-seat A380 aircraft from July 3 onwards. As Australia remains a key source of inbound traffic for Singapore, this will enable SIA to garner a greater market share on this competitive route also served by aviation heavyweights such as Qantas Airways and Cathay Pacific.



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Myanmar's bright future

European interest is up, but buyers urge better services and rates, write **Shekhar Niyogi** and **Mimi Hudoyo**



The pagodas of Bagan (pictured here) as well as Myanmar's other historical aspects lure European visitors

Myanmar's shift from being a closed economy to an open one has transformed the destination's tourism fortunes in recent years, with European buyers hailing the country as a rising star.

Kerstin Streich, senior product manager Asia of Tischler Reisen, based in Germany, said: "We have been sending many FITs to Myanmar over the last

three years. Tourist inflow has increased greatly, at 25 per cent every year over the last two years."

France-based tour company, Abako, also reported interest in Myanmar from incentive groups. The agency's general manager, Jose Henrique Goncalves, said: "We sent five small incentive groups of 20-25 pax each to Myanmar last year, and we got good feedback. This year we expect

business to Myanmar to grow by 50 per cent."

Goncalves believes that Myanmar will become a "single destination focus" for his leisure clients who are typically drawn to the culture, history and lifestyle of the locals.

Official tourism statistics collected by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism of Myanmar show that European visitors arriv-

ing through Yangon numbered 135,692 last year, representing 24.5 per cent of total arrivals. France led the European pack with 29,684 arrivals, followed by the UK with 23,291 visitors and Germany with 21,856.

While comparisons to 2011 European arrivals are not available, Aung Myat Kyaw, managing director of Orchestra Travel and Tour, told the *Daily* that arrivals from Germany "are increasing every year".

German airline Condor's commencement of direct flights between Frankfurt and Yangon last November has also inspired greater confidence of increased German arrivals in the years ahead.

However, some travel consultants grumbled that the destination's pricey hotel rates were a mismatch with the rudimentary service quality offered by hotels and tour guides.

Tischler Reisen's Streich lamented: "Hotel rates are very high but the quality of service and guides are still very basic."

According to Streich, five-star hotel rates are now going at US\$250, much higher than her desired US\$150.

Limited hotel choices are a pain for travel consultants too, with most saying that there are not enough hotels of international standard in key destinations. The tourism ministry is moving to remedy the situation.

"New hotel projects are checked to (ensure they) meet international standards, while existing properties are being reviewed," said Kyi Kyi Aye, adding that the ministry is developing a checklist of what hotels will need to be on par with international hotels. The ministry is also ready to offer hotels technical help and micro financing. — **Additional reporting by Rahul Khanna**

Strong demand but sellers are worried

Myanmar welcomed 1.1 million travellers to its shores in 2012, an increase of 30 per cent compared to 2011.

The majority of travellers – 554,531 – arrived through Yangon, up 54.3 per cent from 2011. Of these, Asian visitors numbered 347,241, with Thailand being the largest source market in the region, generating 91,817 arrivals. The US contributed nearly 36,500 visitors, while Europe churned out 135,692 visitors to Myanmar.

Tourism statistics also showed that the FIT segment made up the single largest group with 232,715 visitors, followed by package tourists (126,036), business travellers (114,456) and social visa holders (37,778).

Myanmar received 33,771 tourists through Mandalay, Nyaung U and Nay Pyi Taw, and 465,614 tourists through checkpoints on the borders with Thailand, China and India.

The Ministry of Hotels & Tourism expects a similar growth rate this year, projecting arrivals of 1.3-1.5 million.

Aung Myat Kyaw, managing director of Orchestra Travel and Tour, is also bracing for more international arrivals in the coming years, spurred by the country's hosting of the 27th Southeast Asian Games this year and status as chair of the ASEAN grouping in 2014 – high-profile events that will raise Myanmar's appeal as a

destination.

While tourism growth is a dream for any destination, the projection has struck fear into the hearts of Myanmar's inbound players. Phyo Wai Yar Zar, managing director of All Asia Exclusive Travel and chairman of the Myanmar Marketing Committee (MMC), warned that urgent investments in infrastructure development was needed to cater to the surge in arrivals.

Demand would outpace infrastructure growth, putting inbound tour operators in a very difficult position, he said.

The country's tourism sellers are also bemoaning a shortage of skilled hospitality staff, a situation that has caused foreign visitors and overseas tourism partners to complain about poor service standards in Myanmar (see story above).

Phyu Phyu Mar, managing director of Seven Star Tours in Yangon, said: "(This year) is (going to be) scary for all inbound tour operators. We suffered and struggled with skyrocketing hotel rates in 2012 (when the country received) a million visitors. Now we are expected to see another 30 per cent increase in arrivals this year.

"What we all need is more accommodation (supply) and skilled workers in the industry. Hoteliers and industry players are trying very hard to provide enough accommodation for 2013-2014." — **Rahul Khanna**

Hotels | Vast room for development

Myanmar has 787 star-rated hotels with a total room inventory of 28,291 rooms in 2012, and the country's room inventory is set to grow, thanks to the government's decision to increase the number of hotel zones.

So far, 11 hotel zones have been created in popular tourist regions and more are likely to be established.

One of the sites to be developed is located on a hill to the east of Inle Lake. The 250-hectare site will be allocated to 16 hotels that have been awaiting planning approval, according to an official from the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry.

The government is keen to encourage both foreign and local investment in the country's hotel and tourism sector, as it recognises the potential for increased job opportunities.

The Myanmar Investment Commission has also put historical state-owned buildings in central Yangon up for tender. Both local and foreign companies have been invited to bid on the properties for conversion into hotels on long-term leases.

International hotel chains are already looking at Myanmar as the next tourism frontier. Thailand's Central Plaza Hotel is considering a joint-venture opportunity in Myanmar, and aims

to conclude its plans by the end of the year.

Global hotel chains including Starwood Hotels & Resorts and Marriott International have also expressed interest in running hotels in Myanmar.

Meanwhile, immediate relief for Myanmar's painful shortage of hotel rooms should come before 2013 is over.

According to Kyi Kyi Aye, consultant to the Tourism Promotion Department, Ministry of Hotels & Tourism, five new hotels with more than 1,000 rooms are under construction, and 56 more with 4,000 rooms are due to open this year across the country.

Airlines | Busier skies ahead

The year ahead will see a hive of activity in the skies over Myanmar, as international and domestic carriers continue to expand operations to the country to cater to growing business and leisure demand.

Following Aung San Suu Kyi's landmark triumph at the by-election in April 2012, eight international carriers have launched direct flights to Myanmar. Rapid growth is also taking place in the domestic sector, with six full-service domestic airlines keen to tap the burgeoning travel demand.

Myanmar's first LCC, Golden Myanmar Airlines, entered the market on January 11. Operating

out of Mandalay, it also plans to fly to Bangkok, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

According to the Centre for Aviation (CAPA), Myanmar's international aviation market currently consists of about 81,000 weekly seats, with more than 75,000 passengers entering Yangon International Airport and approximately 5,500 arriving at



Mandalay International Airport.

These numbers reflect extraordinary growth when compared to the figures captured in April 2012 – there were only 49,000 weekly seats to Yangon and 2,000 to Mandalay.

Last October, Thai AirAsia launched four-weekly services to Mandalay from Bangkok and on January 11, the service was upgraded to daily. Bangkok Airways will operate four-weekly flights from September, while Thai Airways is considering servicing the Mandalay route via its regional unit, Thai Smile.

Myanmar carriers are expanding their operations too. Myanmar Airways International launched thrice-weekly flights to Gaya, India last November and is planning to add direct daily Mandalay-Bangkok services by the end of this month.

Yangon International Airport will be upgraded to double its handling capacity from 2.7 to 5.5 million passengers a year.

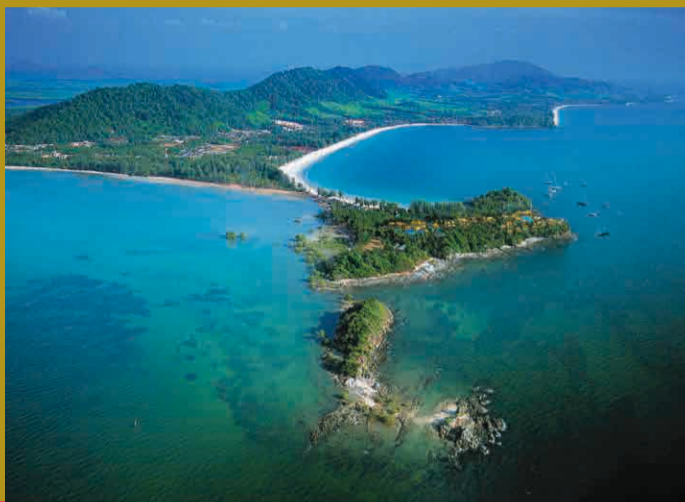
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Hong Kong stays positive

German arrivals are holding steady and the mood on the ground is decidedly upbeat due to a favourable exchange rate and new infrastructure. Report by **Prudence Lui**



Victoria Harbour at dusk

Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre

Hong Kong witnessed a slight dip in German arrivals between January to November 2012. The destination welcomed 205,645 German travellers in that period, a slight drop of 0.4 per cent.

However, it was a different story with the other German-speaking markets of Switzerland and Austria. Swiss arrivals rose 1.3 per cent to 47,766, while Austrian arrivals saw little change, at 23,745.

Average per capita spending for overnight visitors from Europe, Africa & the Middle East markets between January-June 2012 also grew 4.9 per cent to HK\$7,252 (US\$935). For the same period in 2011, these

markets registered an average per capita spend of HK\$7,147, up 7.1 per cent year-on-year.

HKTB's executive director, Anthony Lau, said: "German consumers live up to their reputation as optimistic (travellers) and they also remain the biggest spenders in the region."

"There is now a trend (among German travellers) to focus on higher quality and luxury (travel) products. German travellers are also looking for unique travel experiences and are increasingly interested in free-and-easy arrangements."

Lau added that HKTB would continue to explore new luxury products for German travellers.

He foresees a number of chal-

lenges lying ahead in 2013, particularly the global financial crisis' negative impact on longhaul travel markets and the escalation of political tensions and competition within Asia.

However, Hong Kong's tourism sector could benefit from a number of positive factors, which Lau said were "the country's favourable exchange rates against a majority of currencies, improvements in tourism infrastructure (such as Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and new attractions in theme parks) that will (boost) our appeal, and enhanced transportation system to Central China following the opening of the Express Rail Link."

"These factors will help drive more visitors from different markets to Hong Kong," he said.

However, veteran operators such as Associated Tours' vice president, Ken Chang, said German-speaking arrivals had been disappointing in 2012 and believed it was due to the impact of the European debt crisis.

"I do not see any encouraging signs for the new year yet. We are looking at hiring a marketing representative company in German-speaking countries to represent us, but this is yet undecided. The German-speaking markets have been too quiet compared to the Scandinavian and Dutch markets."

The number of German-speaking guests at The Excelsior, Hong Kong stayed flat in 2012. Despite the continued economic vulnerability of Europe, the hotel projects an increase in visitors for 2013 but expects room rates to plateau.

The hotel's general manager, Michael Ziemer, said: "The percentage of (business from) German-speaking markets will hold constant in 2013 and we will continue working to increase business from this segment. Our hotel representatives aim to establish new contacts at ITB Berlin this year to further strengthen our presence in this market."

Peter Pollmeier, general manager of InterContinental Grand Stanford Hong Kong, a property popular with German travellers due to its proximity to MTR Hung Hom Station, which offers a direct train into Guangzhou, observed that German arrivals to Hong Kong displayed positive growth.

"But for us, growth was flat; it generated five per cent in 2012, compared with 5.5 per cent in 2011. We expected a slow-down, due to the economic situation in Europe, which resulted in fewer or shorter trips by the business travellers from Germany."

"Our German guests are mostly business travellers and we noticed that they are still price-conscious despite the fact that the global economy is stabilising," said Pollmeier.

Pollmeier does not expect to see a "strong pick up" in German arrivals to Hong Kong this year "as the majority of German travellers are still focusing on travelling within their own country" or to Indian Ocean and US destinations.

Strong Chinese arrivals plump up overall figures

Last year turned out to be another record-breaking year for Hong Kong's tourism sector as visitor arrivals soared 16 per cent to 48.6 million.

Hong Kong Tourism Board executive director, Anthony Lau, said the NTO had expected total arrivals for the year to exceed the original forecasted 44.2 million.

"In recent years, HKTB has made use of 10 promotional windows to showcase Hong Kong's tourism appeal. Each of these windows features at least one core tourism strength (such as traditional festivals, cultural cel-

ebrations, arts and performance) and a bundle of events along with a HKTB mega event. These strategies not only drew more arrivals and enriched visitors' experience, they also raise Hong Kong's profile and reinforced its Asia's World City brand," he said.

"In addition, HKTB has adopted a highly flexible approach in allocating resources to various markets to counter market volatility amid economic uncertainty. This enables HKTB to adapt swiftly to unforeseen market changes."

Attractions such as sky100 Hong Kong Observation Deck



sky100 Hong Kong Observation Deck offers a complete city view

echoed positive observations. Managing director, Josephine Lam, said, "Our performance

last year was encouraging as we achieved double-digit growth of over 50 per cent in overall attendance as compared to 2011 figures.

"We see huge potential in the tourist market, and we are optimistic about 2013 as we are seen as the best place for tourists to get a complete view of Hong Kong."

However, the hike in tourist arrivals to Hong Kong was driven mostly by the increase in mainland Chinese visitors, a segment that dominated 70 per cent of the destination's inbound traffic.

Holiday World Tours' man-

aging director, Paul Leung, said: "Out of total arrivals, about 10 million are same-day visitors (likely mainland Chinese), so international shorthaul and longhaul markets only showed stable growth. The rise in foreign tourist numbers was small and not proportional to the overall increase."

Leung would like to see HKTB allocate more resources to build a good mix of source markets.

"More destination promotion is needed in other markets like India, Singapore and Malaysia, which did not grow much," he added.

Hotels | More rooms on the horizon

The robust pace of new openings continues in 2013, after growth in the sector last year pushed Hong Kong's hotel inventory from 190 in 2011 to 214 in 2012.

The Hong Kong Tourism Board estimates that another 23 properties will open their doors this year, spreading out to secondary locations like Kwun Tong and San Po Kong in East Kowloon due to escalating land prices and the shortage of land within the CBD.

Set to debut in Hong Kong in mid-2013, the "neighbourhood lifestyle" Pentahotel Hong Kong, Kowloon is located near the upcoming Kai Tak Cruise Terminal. The 695-room hotel will feature one floor of meeting and function spaces, and recreational facilities including a gym and outdoor swimming pool.

Opening in March 2013, the 539-room Courtyard by Marriott Hong Kong Sha Tin will be the second international brand property in the Sha Tin district after Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Sha Tin, which opened in 2009.

A five-minute walk to the MTR Shek Mun Station (Ma On Shan Line), the property offers tranquil views of the Shing Mun River.



Mira Moon is slated to open in 2Q2013

Meanwhile, Auberge Discovery Bay Hong Kong on Lantau Island is scheduled to open in Spring 2013, boasting 325 sea-facing rooms and suites. Aside from the 700m² pillar-less Grand Azure Ballroom and seven function rooms, the property's ocean views and outdoor terraces make it an ideal venue for events.

The popularity of boutique design hotels in Hong Kong is set to grow.

Miramar Group's Mira Moon will open in the second quarter of 2013. Located amid the hustle and bustle of the Wanchai district, the hotel occupies a former commercial building. An upgrade and transformation was

ordered for the hotel. Themed after the Chinese folklore behind the Mid-Autumn Festival, the property has 90 rooms designed in three sizes ranging from 21.9m² to 40.5m², as well as a 139.4m² penthouse. Other facilities include a lobby bar, restaurant, gym, and an iPad docking station in each room.

Visitors to Hong Kong this year and beyond will also get to take their pick of properties such as the Hotel Indigo Hong Kong Island, which will welcome guests from April 15 onwards, the Best Western Grand Hotel at Tsim Sha Tsui (396 rooms, 1Q2013) and Dorsett Regency Tsuen Wan (570 rooms, 1Q2013).

Airlines | Bright prospects

Between January to November 2012, total passenger traffic at the Hong Kong International Airport climbed 4.8 per cent to 51.5 million. With new carriers and additional flight requests coming in this year, prospects for the city's aviation industry look bright.

In January, homegrown carrier Dragonair opened new daily flights to Zhengzhou and Wenzhou in mainland China and four times weekly services to Yangon. The airline is also scheduled to begin flights to Danang in Vietnam on March 28.

According to the Civil Aviation Department, new airlines applying to fly to Hong Kong include Nepal's BB Airways and Myanmar Airways International. Meanwhile, 12 carriers will increase the frequencies of scheduled passenger services into Hong Kong this year.

Air Seychelles will mark its entry into Asia with thrice-weekly flights between Hong Kong and Seychelles via Abu Dhabi on March 24.

The airline's CEO, Cramer Ball, said: "This will mark our entry into Asia, a vibrant and booming region which can be a huge driver of tourism to the

Seychelles...It is also a potential gateway to expand Air Seychelles' reach within the region, with convenient connections to more than 30 destinations across mainland China, Japan and Australia."

Low-cost carrier Jetstar Hong Kong, the product of a joint venture between Qantas Group and China Eastern Airlines, is waiting for the green light from the Hong Kong government. Once approved, Jetstar will operate flights to China, Japan, South Korea and destinations in South-east Asia with an initial fleet of three new Airbus A320-200 aircraft, configured for 180 passengers each. The carrier plans to grow its fleet to 18 planes by 2015.

Cathay Pacific Airways will be adjusting its operations this year. A spokesman from the airline said: "Under the current plan, passenger capacity will be trimmed by 1.5 per cent this year, the first cut since 2009. The reduction in capacity is caused by the early retirement of Boeing 747-400 aircraft in 4Q2012 and 2013, and their replacement with smaller Boeing 777-300ERs. During 2012, we reduced the frequencies on some North American and European routes."

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Cambodia reaches up



Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia

Angkor Wat's appeal to German tourists makes it a double-edged sword

German demand for Cambodia remains on a steady skyward trajectory as interest in the country spreads beyond Siem Reap and Angkor Wat, reports **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena**

A significant longhaul source market, German arrivals to Cambodia have increased by around 10-15 per cent annually in recent years, according to Cambodian Ministry of Tourism (MOT) director general, Tith Chantha.

Cambodia welcomed 54,104 German tourists in the first 10 months of 2012, a year-on-year rise of 11.6 per cent, based on MOT data.

"In 2013, Cambodia is optimistic about maintaining growth of German arrivals in a sustainable manner," said Tith.

"The MOT is anticipating a 15-20 per cent rise in German arrivals, particularly through Condor Air which provides a direct connection to Cambodia."

The German carrier commenced a weekly Frankfurt-Siem Reap service in November 2012 – the longest non-stop scheduled flight to Cambodia.

Trade players that *The Daily* spoke to also shared a buoyant outlook in keeping Cambodia on the travel radar of the German-speaking market.

Frank Hasso Wiegand, managing director Europe, Focus Asia, said: "We are expecting huge growth from the German market to Cambodia in 2013 due to our overall company growth. Cambodia remains very popular among the Germans, so I would expect the market to expand between five and 10 per cent this year if the German economy remains stable."

Business to Cambodia is also steadily rising for ICS Travel Group, remarked chief sales officer, Sabine Widmann.

"Cambodia has never experienced a boom like what Myanmar is seeing now or like Vietnam's some years ago, but business to this destination from German-speaking countries is

on a more stable year-on-year increase of about five to eight per cent."

Angkor Wat remains Cambodia's strongest attraction, but interest is trickling down to other areas, particularly ecotourism and beaches in the south.

Sibylle Rotzler, sales manager, Backyard Travel, said: "Siem Reap is top of the list, followed by Phnom Penh and Battambang, but the coast has been gaining a lot of attention in the past two years."

"More German clients are going there to experience the unique scenery and quiet beaches around Kep, Kampot and particularly the wild nature of Koh Kong Province."

Widmann added: "German clients do not solely focus on Angkor Wat, and are especially keen to see the more remotely located temple ruins such as Koh Ker, Beng Mealea and Phnom Kulen.

"Requests for golfing packages and adventure tours to more remote areas are also on the rise."

To tap the Germans' "more adventurous" inclinations compared to other European travelers, ICS Travel Group started marketing southern Cambodia more aggressively to German-speaking markets through the launch of new packages and a fam trip in summer 2012, Widmann revealed.

At the new Song Saa Private Island in the Koh Rong Archipelago, German guests also made their presence felt by chalking up seven per cent of the total occupancy at the high-end resort last year, said Jared Green, assistant director of sales and marketing.

"We are seeing more guests at Song Saa from Germany and envisage a continuation of this trend. We are looking to grow this particular market by five per cent in 2013."

Despite an overall positive outlook, Cambodia's tourism development still remains fraught with challenges such as the lack of promotion as a standalone destination, undeveloped infrastructure and limited hotel choices outside the main cities.

Most significantly, its heavy reliance on Angkor Wat as a tourism destination is a double-edged sword.

Said Wiegand: "For most Germans, Angkor is still the only reason to travel to Cambodia. The average stay of a German tourist in Cambodia is still around three to four days, probably the shortest compared to all other countries in the region."

"Cambodia should invest more on publicity to showcase the beauty and variety of the entire country – it's still not yet a standalone destination but has so much more to offer than only Angkor."

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Hardware upgrade for tourist influx

Cambodia's stellar performance in 2012 has spurred industry bodies to strengthen the country's hardware to support the surge in tourist numbers.

According to Cambodia's ministry of tourism (MOT), Cambodia saw 2.8 million international tourists in 2011, a 15 per cent increase from 2010.

Tith Chantha, director general, said: "The tourism sector created 350,000 jobs and US\$1.9 billion in revenue, contributing about 12 per cent of the country's GDP (for 2011)."

The first eight months of 2012 brought 2.3 million international tourist arrivals, a year-on-year increase of 24.5 per cent. Tith said the ministry was optimistic that foreign tourists to Cambodia would reach the targeted 3.3 million, marking two consecutive years of 15 per cent growth.

Significant highlights for Cambodia in 2012 included the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh in November. The summit, attended by US president Barack Obama and outgoing Chinese premier Wen Jiabao, drew considerable international attention.

From January to September 2012, Cambodia's top source markets included neighbours Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia as well as South Korea, China and Japan, while longhaul markets like the US, France and Australia also contributed to international arrivals, showed data from MOT's statistics and tourism information department.

To cope with the expected influx, close to US\$400 million will go to upgrading the airports in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville between now and 2020, announced Nicolas Notebaert, chairman of VINCI Airports, last November. VINCI Airports' concessionaire, Cambodia Airports, operates the country's three international airports.

Notebaert also revealed that US\$80 million had been allocated for the expansion of the new international terminal at Phnom Penh International Airport, and works would include the installation of a new state-of-the-art baggage handling system, and 3,000m² more retail space.

The company will pour in another US\$100 million to upgrade Siem Reap International Airport – the gateway to the historical Angkor temples – and a further US\$200 million to spruce up passenger facilities and add a new runway at Sihanoukville International Airport.

The MOT has also kicked off domestic campaigns such as *Clean City Clean Resorts*, *Good Service* and *Clean Tourist City Standard*, with the latter integrated as part of the ASEAN Clean Tourist City Standard during the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2013 in Laos.

The campaigns are aimed at encouraging cities to improve their sanitation standards while enhancing Cambodia's attractiveness to foreigners, said MOT's Tith.

Airline | More longhaul air links



Condor Air brought Cambodia closer to Germany with its new Frankfurt-Siem Reap flights last November

The aviation sector in Cambodia is gaining new heights with the slew of carriers that have launched flights to the kingdom.

Germany's Condor Air launched its inaugural flight from Frankfurt to Siem Reap on November 3. The weekly service is operated on Boeing 767-300 aircraft with 270 seats.

Qatar Airways started Doha-Phnom Penh flights on February 20, 2013, becoming the first Middle Eastern carrier to fly to Cambodia.

An extension of the existing Ho Chi Minh City route, the service is served by an Airbus A330 aircraft in a two-class configuration (248 economy and 36 business seats).

"We were delighted to learn that Qatar Airways has launched this new route as it allows travellers from North America, Europe and the Middle East easier access to Cambodia," said Backyard Travel's operations and product director Maeve Nolan.

She said her company has re-

sponded with new tours in the country to tap the expected surge in demand brought by the Gulf carrier.

However, barely two years after restarting flights to Cambodia following a 37-year hiatus, Air France will terminate direct thrice-weekly services between Paris and Phnom Penh with a transit stop in Ho Chi Minh City, from end-March 2013.

Diethelm Travel Cambodia's managing director, Pierre Jungo, said: "Luckily, Qatar Airways (has launched) flights to Phnom Penh and I imagine that these flights will bring us more clients than Air France."

Within South-east Asia, Tiger Airways commenced daily services between Singapore and Phnom Penh via a 180-seat Airbus A320 on October 1, 2012, becoming the third carrier after Jetstar Asia and SilkAir to link the two cities.

Cambodia Angkor Air started daily flights between Siem Reap and Bangkok on November 30 last year on an ATR72 turboprop

with a capacity of 67 seats, marking the carrier's first link with Thailand and breaking Bangkok Airway's monopoly on this route.

Myanmar Airways International's (MAI) Yangon-Siem Reap-Phnom Penh-Yangon flights, suspended since September 19 last year, was reinstated on December 1. The triangular routing has, however, been delinked. MAI now operates twice-weekly Yangon-Phnom Penh and Yangon-Siem Reap services using Airbus A320 aircraft.

Meanwhile, Lao Central Airlines is due to launch flights from Vientiane to Phnom Penh on a 168-seat aircraft soon, although the date had not been announced at press time.

Welcoming the new regional air links, Khiri Travel Cambodia's general manager, Jack Bartholomew, said: "The resumption of Myanmar-Cambodia flights will be great – our clients will not have to go via Bangkok as we offer several multi-country itineraries featuring both Myanmar and Cambodia."

Hotels | New developments to blossom



Watch out for new stays at Frangipani Living Arts Hotel & Spa (left) and Park Hyatt Siem Reap

Cambodia's hotel inventory outlook remains rosy, with a majority of new hotels slated for debut in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap over the next few years. Mixed-use developments are also underway.

Frangipani Villa Hotels is expanding its portfolio in Phnom Penh to "up the accommodation options to capture more of the mid- to high-end leisure and business travel market," said Kelly Chen Dara, group sales & marketing director.

Besides launching the 72-key Frangipani Royal Palace Hotel & Spa in Phnom Penh on November 1 last year, the group opened a bigger property in the capital

city on January 1 this year.

Located near the Russian Market, the new 123-key Frangipani Living Arts Hotel & Spa features a restaurant, a rooftop lounge, two swimming pools, a fitness centre and a spa.

Hyatt Hotel Corporation is now gearing up to open its first property in the country, Park Hyatt Siem Reap, in April 2013. Formerly the Hotel de La Paix, the rebranded property is currently undergoing a complete renovation. Located near the Old Market/Pub Street, the hotel will feature 109 rooms, two restaurants, a bar, meeting facilities, a spa, fitness centre and two swimming pools.

Said Franz Mascarenhas, Park Hyatt Siem Reap's general manager: "The hotel will feature contemporary-style rooms by renowned designer Bill Bensley, which will be equipped with high-tech amenities such as built-in push buttons for temperature controls and black-out shades. The hotel will also offer new suite concepts with two-bedroom options featuring private swimming pools and intimate gardens."

NagaCorp, Cambodia's largest hotel, gaming and leisure operator, broke ground in November 2012 for Naga2, a large-scale mixed-use integrated resort situated 200m from the existing Naga-

World, an integrated casino-hotel in Phnom Penh.

To be completed in 2015, the 111,000m² Naga2 development will feature two five-star luxury hotels – a 24-storey property with 1,000 keys and a rooftop pool, and a second with 50 luxury suites spread across 22 storeys – and a podium block incorporating a 3,000-pax theatre.

Highlights include a world-class gaming and entertainment complex and NagaCityWalk, a mall offering a spectrum of luxury shopping boutiques and top restaurants.

The Cambodian capital will also welcome the Sokha Hotel & Convention Center, which is set

to open its doors by mid-2014.

Overlooking the Mekong River and the Tonle Sap River, the property will appeal to event organisers with 798 rooms and suites, a 1,500-pax convention centre, a spa, a swimming pool, high-end condominiums, villas, shopping and entertainment centres, restaurants and a residence club house.

To the south of Cambodia, slated for debut in Sihanoukville in 2014 is the 17-storey Mit-tapheap Hotel, which is being developed by Khouch Asia Company. The property will have 500 rooms, three restaurants, a 500-seat conference room as well as five smaller conference rooms.

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SINGAPORE High-profile newbies on the block

Spanish feast

Culinary luminaries from the hallowed kitchens of elBulli, Santi, Drolma and Sketch have come together to helm Catalunya, a restaurant devoted to bringing authentic Spanish recipes to life. The eatery, which opened last August, is housed in the glass-encased Fullerton Pavilion situated atop the waters of Marina Bay. A feast for the senses awaits diners tucking into its carefully curated menu, which fuses elements of contemporary and traditional Spanish cuisine.

Sleep among lush greenery

Pan Pacific Hotels Group opened the 367-room Parkroyal on Pickering in Singapore on January 16. It is positioned as a hotel in a garden, with lush landscaping constituting twice the hotel's land area. Facilities include an open-kitchen concept restaurant, an infinity pool with stylish cabanas, and expansive meeting spaces. The hotel enjoys an excellent location that puts guests within walking distance of the business district, Chinatown and Club Street where many unique restaurants and bars can be found.

A walk in the gardens

Spanning over 101 hectares in the vibrant Marina Bay district, Singapore's second botanic gardens is home to just over a quarter of a million rare plant species and is divided into three areas: Bay South, Bay East and Bay Central. The 54-hectare Bay South, the largest of the three, features two climatically controlled biodomes and the futuristic Supertrees, which are manmade vertical gardens.



Parkroyal on Pickering

Stylish stays in Sentosa

Starwood's glamorous 240-room W Singapore - Sentosa Cove opened last September to a flurry of publicity. Aimed at individuals who love to stay on top of the latest trends in art, fashion and music, the hotel boasts its own private docking berths. There is also a spa, a gym, an outdoor pool and a relaxing lounge that transforms into a lively party central with a live DJ to boot.

Under the sea

Resorts World Sentosa's long-awaited Marine Life Park, the largest oceanarium in the world, opened on December 7 last year. The eight-hectare park comprises two key experiences: the Adventure Cove Waterpark, a tropical paradise of waterslides and a wave pool; and the S.E.A Aquarium – the world's largest – housing over 100,000 marine animals of over 800 species in more than 45 million litres of water.



Get acquainted with the underwater creatures at the Marine Life Park

INDIA New stays and more family fun

Gurgaon gets a Hilton

Hilton Worldwide has opened its second mid-priced Hilton Garden Inn brand hotel in India with the launch of the 201-room Hilton Garden Inn Gurgaon Baani Square. The hotel sits near prime corporate, commercial and residential districts, and is a 10-minute drive from the DLF Cyber City central business hub. Business travellers staying at the hotel will enjoy the brand's signature offerings such as complimentary Internet access, 24-hour complimentary business centre facilities, complimentary remote printing service from the guestroom to the business centre and the 24-hour Pavilion Pantry convenience mart. Other facilities include four meeting rooms and various dining establishments.

New wonders

Worlds of Wonder, a theme park located in the heart of Noida, unveiled a 1.4-hectare man-made lake last September. It will keep the novelties

rolling with the opening of Calypso Bay, pegged as Asia's biggest water park, by March this year. Attractions such as a 5D cinema, a skating arena and go-karting are also in the pipeline.

Banyan tree spreads its shade

Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts will launch Banyan Tree Kerala in 1Q2013, marking the group's debut in India. Located on the private island of Nedyathuruthu in the Alleppey district of Kerala, Banyan Tree Kerala is an hour south of Kochi International Airport and a 10-minute boat ride from the resort's private jetty in nearby Vaduthala. The 59-villa resort will also feature the group's first dedicated Ayurvedic Centre, which will offer personalised consultations by qualified Ayurvedic doctors who will recommend tailored treatments based on individual needs. The resort will welcome meetings and events with a boardroom, two meeting rooms and a banquet hall that can accommodate up to 150 guests.

INDONESIA High seas, good life ripe for picking



Luxurious sailings

Alila Purnama (picture, right) is a 46m luxurious live-aboard *Phinisi*, a South Sulawesi traditional ship, which offers five cabins across three decks, including one master suite with wraparound windows offering 270° views. Also on board are a fully licensed PADI dive centre and spa therapist. Launched in mid-December 2012, *Alila Purnama* can take up to 10 passengers to exotic Indonesian destinations such as the Raja Ampat Islands, Banda Islands and Komodo-Flores. From April 6 to October 25, 2013, the vessel will head to Komodo Island, sailing through the Flores Seas, on a six-night adventure.

For the love of shopping

Visitors to Jakarta have a new shopping haunt. Kota Kasablanka, located on Jalan Casablanca, is the latest mall in the capital. Said to be the largest shopping mall in South Jakarta, it boasts 110,000m² of modern retail establishments, with 13 anchor tenants. Shoppers can find Indonesian and international brands at the mall, and delight their tummies with a variety of cuisines at the food court, which features a floating stage where performances are screened. The mall is part of the Kota Kasablanka superblock, which includes apartments and office buildings.

New seaside lure

The Whacko Beach Club is a new all-day eatery that opened in late December 2012 in Tanjung Benoa, Bali. Entertainment here includes an acoustic band that plays daily, a live DJ and special shows by the beach. Besides being a great place to relax, The Whacko is suitable for private events, weddings and after-sports gatherings. It can cater for standing cocktails with up to 300 guests, and can whip up an international menu.

Autograph now in Bali

The Stones Hotel Legian, Bali opened in November 2012, heralding the arrival of Marriott International's Autograph Collection in the Asia-Pacific. The hotel offers 308 guestrooms and 22 suites, a 3,000m² pool, F&B options and a spa. It is within walking distance of the popular Kuta, Legian and Seminyak areas.

More Bangkok links

Garuda Indonesia ramped up its Jakarta-Bangkok services from twice to thrice daily from December 1 amid improving economic situations in both countries. The new GA864 flight leaves Jakarta at 16.20 to arrive in Bangkok at 20.10, while the return GA865 flight leaves Bangkok at 06.35, arriving in Jakarta at 10.10.

Bintan gets new MICE venue

The 473-key Bintan Lagoon Resort unveiled its new Conference Centre at the end of February. The three-storey building houses a column-free banquet hall capable of hosting up to 1,300 guests, an outdoor roof terrace and spacious pre-function and foyer areas. It also boasts the latest in lighting and audiovisual capabilities and high-speed wireless Internet throughout.

PHILIPPINES A delightful blend of old and new

Mega mall refreshed

Repositioned as a hub for tourists and shoppers and located near the new Fairmont and Raffles Makati, the spruced up section of Glorietta mall boasts a whopping 864 shops. This includes 214 new additions, an expanse of outdoor gardens, and more family and leisure programmes at the activity centre.

New at the museum

The National Museum of the Philippines has unveiled its new look after a facelift that saw renovation work on its gallery floors and public spaces. The National Art Gallery has also been renamed as the Museum Foundation of the Philippines Hall in recognition of the organisation that funded the museum's retrofitting works. Eight galleries have been launched on top of the 11 that are already open to the public.



Party on the water

The Venue Party Boat in Davao City is an all-in-one social venue that can be chartered for corporate events, teambuilding, social functions and private gatherings. Cruising around Samal Island and Davao Gulf, the vessel has three decks for dining, a buffet restaurant and a coffee shop.

Get glowing

A renowned integrated medical and wellness resort, the Farm at San Benito, Batangas now offers 10 new Narra Pool Villas. Nestled on a ridge running alongside a stream, each villa comes with a heated swimming pool with hydro jets, outdoor and covered terraces, a palatial bathroom with double sinks, a shower bathtub as well as private gardens with a breathtaking view of the ridge and surrounding jungle.

Romancing the past

Las Casas Filipinas de Acuzar in Bagac, Bataan is a unique resort, comprising 27 heritage houses that were uprooted and transplanted from their original sites around the country. Spanish-style lodgings, horse-drawn carriages on cobble stone streets, a serenade of Filipino love songs called *kundiman*, cuisine of the era and a tranquil backdrop of mountains, rivers and rice fields complete the old Philippines theme.

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Kalimantan

CHINA Top notch additions to tourism offerings

Tianjin gets a touch of luxury

The Ritz-Carlton will launch a new hotel in Tianjin, one of the five national central cities as designated by the Chinese government, in mid-2013. Located 30 minutes away from Beijing via high-speed train, the Ritz-Carlton, Tianjin will offer 277 guestrooms, including 52 suites. The hotel will also feature four F&B outlets – including a Cantonese restaurant with 10 private dining rooms, each equipped with its own wine cellar – as well as an indoor swimming pool, luxury fitness and spa facilities. Event planners can also make use of the hotel's conference spaces such as one of the city's largest ballrooms and three function rooms, totalling 1,625m².

Fine sailings

China's first luxury cruise ship *Henna* set sail on her maiden voyage in late January from Sanya Phoenix Island International Port, becoming the first Chinese company to enter the cruise market. Operated by Cruise Yacht Management, which is owned by HNA Tourism, *Henna* features 739 passenger cabins, including nine suites with balconies, 432 ocean-view staterooms and 298 interior staterooms. It has a maximum passenger capacity of 1,965. The ship is outfitted with a range of facilities, ranging from restaurants, duty-free shops and casinos to cinemas, meeting rooms, and a swimming pool. Homeporting in Sanya and Tianjin from January to April, *Henna* will sail between Sanya and Vietnam's Halong Bay and Da-

nang from January to April, and between Tianjin and South Korea's Incheon and Jeju Island from May to September.

Zhuhai mega resort set to open

Guangdong Chimelong Group will unveil in mid-2013 its new Chimelong International Ocean Resort in Zhuhai, a prefecture-level city on the southern coast of China's Guangdong province. The mega resort's general manager, Ivan Leung, said the property would feature a 1,888-room ocean-themed luxury hotel, a man-made beach with a wave pool, and various MICE facilities including a 3,000m² grand ballroom, a 1,300m² ballroom and 24 smaller function rooms. Water taxis will provide transfers between the hotel and the Ocean Kingdom water theme park via a 1km canal. Covering 500,000m², the park will offer nine different rides, three separate shows featuring sea lions, dolphins and beluga whales, as well as the largest aquarium in the world, filled with 24,000 cubic tonnes of water.

W to enter Guangzhou

Guangzhou will be the first mainland Chinese city to host a W hotel when the W Guangzhou Hotel & Residences opens its doors in early 2013. The 320-key property, situated in the Pearl River New Town district, will feature a signature Chinese restaurant Yan Yu and a destination bar, among other facilities, as well as cutting-edge architectural and interior designs.

HONG KONG Something for all travellers



Thrill Mountain

Thrilling rides abound

Thrill Mountain is the latest attraction to join Ocean Park Hong Kong after its extensive revamp. It follows the launch of two new zones in 2011 – Aqua City and Rainforest. Thrill Mountain, located adjacent to the Summit Station of the Ocean Express, is a carnival-themed area with six exhilarating rides, eight booth games and a variety of dining outlets.

More Disney magic

Grizzly Gulch and Mystic Point are new themed areas in Hong Kong Disneyland. Grizzly Gulch is based on an original story created exclusively for the theme park, and offers an immersive Wild West experience. Mystic Point, which is set to open this summer, features an eccentric world adventurer with a collection of exotic and mysterious international artefacts.

The power of silence

Perfect as a teambuilding activity, Dialogue in Silence introduces participants to a world of complete silence. The three-hour workshop is facilitated by professional deaf trainers, teaching participants to listen with their eyes, express themselves through their bodies and experience life with their hearts, in order to

enhance one's communication skills.

A new cruise harbour

Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, located on the runway of the former Kai Tak Airport, is right at the heart of Victoria Harbour. The first berth is expected to be operational in June 2013.



Fresh Prince of Hong Kong

Prince Hotel in Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong has completed its refurbishment programme, arming it with updated guestrooms, suites and club lounge as well as other new guest facilities. All 393 guestrooms and suites have been given new carpets, curtains, upholstery and art pieces, while some are equipped with spacious shower facilities. The Continental Club Lounge also promises improved guest experience. Other new additions to the hotel include a gym and complimentary Wi-Fi.

MYANMAR More fun in the country

Go shopping

Opened a year ago in Yangon, Junction Square is nestled on Pyay Road and Kyuntaw Road in Kamaryut township. The new 3.6-hectare mall offers more than 27,871m² of shops selling apparel, jewellery, IT products, furniture and more. Junction Square also has three movie theatres and a health and wellness centre on the third floor.

Make a splash on Irrawaddy

Orient-Express's new river cruiser, Orcaella, has started plying the Irrawaddy River. Sailing between Yangon and Bhamo, the four-deck, 50-pax boat will operate from January to April and July to December. There is an observation deck, an all-day lounge and bar, a swimming pool, a fitness centre, a spa, as well as a resident doctor. It is suitable for corporate events too, with a deck that is large enough for 70-80 people.

Easier access to Nay Pyi Taw

Daily charter services to Nay Pyi Taw started on September 9 last year, operated by FMI Air Charter, a subsidiary of First Myanmar Investment. The thrice-daily Yangon-Nay Pyi Taw service is operated

using the 44-seat ATR 42 and 16-seat Beech 1900D. Flights depart at 07.00, 11.30 and 16.00.



Ice WonderLand

Myanmar gets new ice park

Myanmar welcomed its first-ever ice park when Ice WonderLand opened its doors on February 25, 2012. Located in Kandawgyi Park near Shwedagon Pagoda, the attraction features a small playground and ice sculptures of famed buildings and personalities from around the world. Visitors should come warmly dressed, as the average temperature in the attraction is below freezing point – between -5°C and -10°C. Light thermal coats are also available for loan, and there is an emergency clinic with a doctor and nurses on standby.

SRI LANKA Go shopping or drive down a scenic road

Cruising round the bends

18 Hairpin Bends on the picturesque Kandy-Mahiyangama road has been redeveloped into a beautiful six-kilometre drive with smooth, spacious bends to negotiate a vehicle. With this redevelopment, 18 Hairpin Bends is rid of its former reputation as a treacherous stretch for motorists. Driving along this new stretch of road offers one spectacular views of the surrounding landscape, with many places to stop and relax.

New retail therapy

Colombo Racecourse is a new mall that opened on the site of a former racecourse on October 20, 2012. It is home to many shops and restaurants.

Second Avani for Sri Lanka

Minor Hotel Group, in partnership with Serendib Leisure, has debuted Avani Kalutara Resort & Spa, the brand's second property in Sri Lanka following the inaugural Avani Bentota Resort &

Spa in November 2011. Formerly Kani Lanka, Avani Kalutara has reopened following a US\$5 million refurbishment. Located in south-west Sri Lanka, Avani Kalutara is built on the mouth of the River Kalu, facing the lagoon in one direction and the Indian Ocean on the other. The 105-key beachfront resort features four room types – Standard, Superior Lagoon View, Superior Sea View and Suites – with facilities such as two restaurants, two bars, a gym, a tennis court, water sports, a spa and flexible meeting space that can accommodate up to 100 people.

Korean Air resumes links

Korean Air is resuming flights to Colombo after 28 years, becoming one of only three airlines to fly to Sri Lanka with a first-class cabin. The thrice-weekly flights between Seoul and Colombo will begin on March 9, with an Airbus A330. The flights will be extended to the Maldives through Colombo.





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Boutique retreats, packing local flavour and personalised experiences, have emerged across Asia, tantalising travellers with promises of a memorable stay. By **Xinyi Liang-Pholsena, Linda Haden, S Puvaneswary, Marianne Carandang, Thomas Stewart, Mimi Hudoyo and Rahul Khanna**

The Alcove Library Hotel, Vietnam

USP Its well-stocked reading room and American-themed bar and grill provide the Western business professional an affordable reprieve from the city's chaotic streets. Located five minutes from Ho Chi Minh City's airport, the hotel offers 38 affordable rooms. **Target** Travelling professionals and mid-range leisure tourists, especially from Western markets. **Price** US\$89++-US\$129++ **Opened** October 19, 2012

Maison D'Hanoi Boutique Hotel, Vietnam

USP Its location in the heart of Hanoi's quaint Old Quarter – the shopping hub of the capital. The company also has four years of experience managing sister property, Maison D'Hanoi Hanova Hotel. Run by a Singaporean general manager, the hotel will offer 42 guest rooms and suites, complete with a piano bar and restaurant. **Target** Leisure and business guests looking for something a bit more intimate and affordable. **Price** US\$80-US\$100 **Opening** December 1, 2012

Sense Hotel Seminyak, Indonesia

USP Located in the upmarket area of Seminyak and within walking distance of Petitenget beach and Bali's best restaurants and bars such as Ku De Ta, La Lucciola, Potato Head, Hu'u and The Living Room Bali. Its 68 rooms fuse together modern and traditional Balinese architectural elements, and there are also free shuttle services within the Seminyak area. **Target** Guests from Indonesia, Asia, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. **Price** US\$250-US\$350 **Opened** June 2012

Bagan Lodge, Myanmar

USP The hotel conveys a traditional Burmese atmosphere through its classic brick design, and is conveniently located in the monument zone, placing guests within walking distance to temples. Managed by Apple Tree Group which owns and manages hotels and clubs across Vietnam and Laos, the property has 85 air-conditioned rooms, a spa and other facilities. **Target** Upscale travellers from Asia-Pacific, as well as Europe and the US. **Price** Undetermined at press time **Opening** April 15, 2013

Seri Chenang Resort & Spa Langkawi, Malaysia

USP The six heritage villas showcase the unique styles of Malay architecture from the states of Kedah, Selangor, Malacca, Negri Sembilan, Pahang and Terengganu. Butler services also incorporate Malay values, cultures and traditions. A haven for birdwatchers, the resort is also an ideal spot to catch bird species escaping the winter from November to February. **Target** Leisure travellers from all markets, especially from regional, the UK and European markets.



Clockwise from top: The House of Cebu, Philippines; Navutu Dreams Resort & Spa, Cambodia; The Amoy, Singapore; The Alcove Library Hotel, Vietnam; Seri Chenang Resort & Spa Langkawi, Malaysia

Price RM1,800-RM6,000 (US\$588-US\$1,959) **Opened** January 1, 2013

Navutu Dreams Resort & Spa, Cambodia

USP Building on the experience of its sister property in Fiji, Navutu Stars Resort, this Siem Reap property offers a Mediterranean-inspired resort setting in a tropical garden. The 18 rooms feature whitewashed interiors adorned with half-moon sofas and objets d'art sourced from around South-east Asia. Facilities include a saltwater pool, a yoga studio, a fitness centre, a spa offering Asian and South Pacific treatments, and a fine-

dining restaurant spotlighting southern Cambodian and Italian cuisines. **Target** Well-travelled professionals, honeymooners and families who want a relaxing and quiet destination. **Price** US\$100-US\$200 **Opened** August 1, 2012

Song Saa Private Island, Cambodia

USP An indulgent experience in the undiscovered Koh Rong archipelago with 27 villas offering luxury such as handcrafted furniture, king-size beds, oversized baths, fully stocked fridges and private decks and pools. As well, Song Saa's commitment to

protecting the local environment and supporting local communities, plus chefs serving customised menus and an over-water Vista Restaurant and Bar offering 360-degree views of the sea. **Target** Discerning travellers who appreciate the natural environment. **Price** US\$1,336-US\$5,153 (all-inclusive) **Opened** March 2012

The House of Cebu, Philippines

USP 38 large rooms (four categories with sizes ranging 36m²-108m²) that combine unique themed murals and interior design with executive comfort. A great F&B experience is also offered, with German/European

Not strange bedfellows

Carlson Rezidor teams with Panorama to build 20 hotels in Indonesia

By Mimi Hudoyo

CARLSON Rezidor Hotel Group and Panorama Group have deepened their collaboration, committing to develop 20 new hotels in Indonesia within seven years under the midscale Radisson and Park Inn by Radisson brands.

Partners since Carlson Wag-onlit Travel Indonesia was set up as a joint venture in 1999, the new company, Carlson Panorama Hospitality, will manage hotels in Jakarta, Surabaya, Jogjakarta and secondary cities like Manado, Makassar, Palembang and Medan. It will have a representative office in Jakarta.

Marking the re-entry of Carlson's hotel business into Indonesia after its venture with Salim Group ended in 2003, Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group's Asia-Pacific president, Simon Barlow, said the timing was right to return to a booming Indonesia.

Citing figures from McKinsey Global Institute's 2012 report, he pointed out that Indonesia was poised to become the world's seventh largest economy by 2030, with 135 million consumers representing a US\$1.38 tril-



Panorama Group's group CEO, Budi Tirtawisata and Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group president, Asia-Pacific, Simon C Barlow, sign the joint venture agreement, with M Chatib Basri, chairman of Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board and Mari Elka Pangestu, the Indonesian Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy as witnesses

lion market opportunity.

Said Barlow: "We saw the first wave of five-star hotels (sweep) across Asia, and in the last four to five years, the emergence of international three- and four-star hotels has now gathered pace."

As such, Carlson would be focused on importing its midscale brands to capture the growing domestic market, he explained.

Also eyeing the rising middle-class segment, Budi Tirtawisata, group CEO, Panorama Group,

remarked that Carlson's expansion would not clash with its own line of hotels by PHM Hospitality as the market was big enough.

"If we see an opportunity to manage a 400-room hotel, for example, I don't think (PHM) has the capacity for it and I will leave it to Carlson Panorama. On the other hand, PHM has products that cater to certain markets such as surfers, and such a property would not fit Carlson's brands," said Budi.

Malaysian theme park wants longhaul visitors to get lost in it

By S Puvaneswary

THE Lost World of Tambun theme park in Perak, Malaysia is seeking to net a greater share of medium and longhaul MICE business, with sights specifically set on central Europe, China, India and the Middle East.

According to Calvin Ho, general manager of the Lost World of Tambun, the park aims to increase the medium and longhaul markets from the current five per cent to 40 per cent by 2015.

Currently, domestic tourists comprise 75 per cent of visitors to the park while regional tourists from South-east Asia make up 20 per cent.

Said Ho: "The Euro is down and the world economy has not fully recovered, but there are still able travellers. Perak is under-visited, and Malaysia on the whole is an affordable destination where travellers can get more out of their money."

Aside from attracting families and eco-enthusiasts with its leisure and natural offerings, the theme park is keen to woo MICE visitors.

"We would like to grow the MICE component as it is a high-yield segment," said Ho.

A 175-room Lost World Hotel is equipped with meeting facilities, and there is also an on-site teambuilding park with outdoor facilities such as a 13 high rope course and rock climbing activity with natural abseil.

To ramp up awareness of the Lost World of Tambun, which is also a member of the Sunway Group, Ho said there were plans to kickstart inaugural efforts to exhibit at international travel trade shows like ITB Asia, World Travel Market and Arabian Travel Market this year.

To further grow the longhaul MICE segment, the destination will work on joint advertising with travel consultants, and organise media and agent familiarisation trips.

"Going for us are 1.5-hour direct flights from Singapore to Ipoh and we are just a two-hour drive from Penang and Kuala Lumpur," Ho added.

"There are several theme parks in Malaysia but we are very unique with nine natural hot spring pools of various temperatures ranging from 37 degrees to 54 degrees, plus we are surrounded by a 400 million-year-old limestone mountain."

cuisine at Paseo Uno and flea market-inspired decor at the Scrapyard bar.

Target Business travellers visiting the nearby business and IT parks, as well as international leisure travellers interested in a boutique hotel experience.

Price US\$143-US\$172

Opened June 2012

The Amoy, Singapore

USP Guests enter by the Fuk Tak Chi Museum, which was once a Chinese temple. Dating back to the 1800s, it was one of the first stops for immigrants coming from China who went to this shrine to offer thanksgiving for their safe arrival. Located within shophouses and with only 37 keys, service is highly customised according to individual needs and preferences.

Target Business travellers who work within or close to the central business district, as well as leisure FITs.

Price S\$200-S\$300 (US\$163-US\$245)

Opening First half of 2013

Cabochon Hotel, Thailand

USP Housed within a historic four-storey building, the hotel captures the charm of 1920s Shanghai chic with a lounge-cum-library – dubbed The Joy Luck Club – featuring vintage memorabilia from around the world, and the Thai Lao Yeh restaurant is decorated with century-old timber. There are only four suites and four studios, each personally appointed by Eugene Yeh who brought to Bangkok The Eugenia Hotel.

Target Couples, families and business travellers yearning for a peaceful and charming environment.

Price 4,000 baht-8,000 baht

(US\$130-US\$260)

Opened April 2, 2012

Riva Surya, Thailand

USP In the historic heart of Bangkok, with easy access to treasured icons such as the Grand Palace and Wat Pho, as well as the

lively Khao San road. Guests can expect panoramic views of the Chao Phraya river, while direct water transport offers a convenient way to reach most of the city's attractions. All 68 rooms feature modern designs and amenities, with Thai influences. The market-inspired Babble & Rum cafe also boasts a strong commitment to organic, locally sourced produce.

Target Business travellers, experiential independent travellers and small higher-end MICE groups.

Price 3,900 baht-15,000 baht

(US\$127-US\$488)

Opened September 15, 2012

Riverside Boutique Resort, Laos

USP The first luxury resort in Vang Vieng accessible as a weekend retreat from Vientiane via a three-hour drive. The decor is distinctly Lao, with each building featuring a different ethnic theme. Located in a quiet part along the Nam Song river, there are 32 rooms and two suites, a large swimming pool and a fully-equipped 120-pax conference room.

Target Western tourists en route to Luang Prabang or Vientiane, Vientiane residents seeking a weekend gateway or retreat/seminar location, and regional visitors from Thailand, China, Vietnam and South Korea.

Price US\$70-US\$300

Opened July 1, 2012

Burasari Heritage Luang Prabang, Laos

USP Set in a restored teakwood residence, the 23-room boutique hotel is decorated in French colonial style and equipped with modern amenities. Nestled right by the Nam Khan river, it is only a few minutes' walk to the night market and the main street where almsgiving to monks takes place every morning.

Target FIT and small groups, mostly from Asia, Europe, Australia, the US and the UK.

Price US\$140-US\$260

Opened November 14, 2012

Hotel 7 Mile, Myanmar

Located 15 minutes from Yangon

International Airport, Hotel 7 Mile offers 22 standard, nine superior and 22 deluxe rooms. The hotel guarantees 24-hour electricity, thanks to its standby generator, and free Wi-Fi Internet access. A meeting room for 15 pax and dining hall for 40 round up the property's features.

Target Mid-range travellers both foreign and local

Price US\$50-US\$80

Opened June 16, 2012

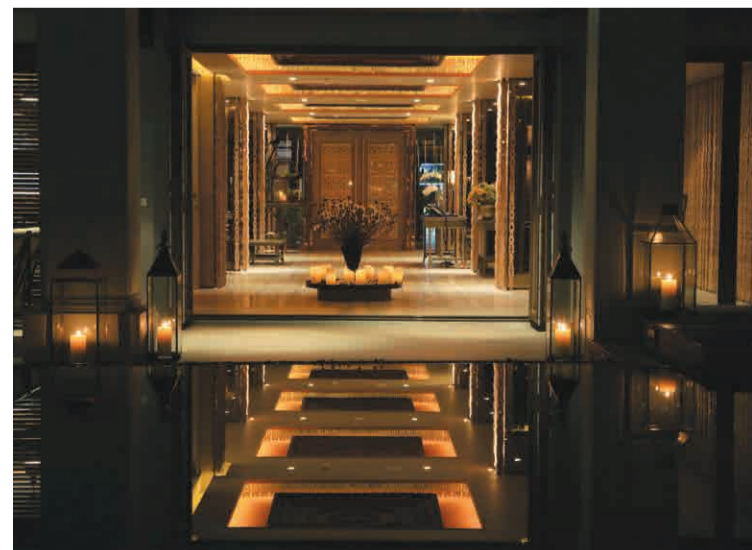
Club Waskaduwa Beach, Sri Lanka

USP Located on the western coast of the resort town Kalutara in Sri Lanka, the contemporary hotel boasts 54 luxury suites and extensive guests facilities such as three restaurants and bars, a hybrid spa specialising in ayurveda and shiatsu and a rooftop garden.

Target Travellers who seek luxurious accommodation options with a touch of Sri Lankan hospitality.

Price US\$300-US\$700

Opened 4Q2013



From left: Burasari Heritage Luang Prabang, Laos; Riva Surya, Thailand

Oh, the exotic Far East!

Patrick Tan captures the vibrant mood as tourism minds worldwide come together for the annual show



Misibis Bay Philippines' Ian Mayer R Varona, Philippine Department of Tourism's (DoT) Mario O Ravanilla and Marie Venus Q Tan, Embassy of the Philippines Germany's Maria Cleofe R Natividad, Philippine DoT's Susan Del Mundo and TRIPS Travel Philippines' Cesar R Cruz (see page 1)



Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts' Hera Adiwikarta, The Samaya Bali's Ray Clark, Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts' Guido Andriano and Royal Ambarukmo's L Sudarsana



Furama Jomtien Beach Thailand's Tatcha Riddhimat, and Furama Hotels International Management Singapore's Jason Peck, Vione Tan and Ivan Chan

Hong Kong Tourism Board's Anthony Lau



Park Lane Hotels International Hong Kong's Elgene Lee, PC Tours & Travel Hong Kong's Paul Chiu and Royal Park Hotel Hong Kong's Carman Cheung



Amari Watergate Bangkok's Pierre-André Pelletier, Amari Hua Hin's Wallee Krooprasert, Onyx Hospitality Group Thailand's Kullapranee Sawareephol and Peter Henley, and Onyx Hospitality Group Germany's Petra Schickling



Vietravel Vietnam's Hoang Dai Ngai, Vo Quang Lien Kha, Vuong Tran Thanh Hien and Phan Ho Hai



Mozaic Hotels & Resorts Singapore's Henry Ng, Carlton Hotel Singapore's Cindy Goo and Travel Central Singapore's David Lee



Siam@Siam Thailand's Sanya Saengboon, Stohler Switzerland's Aline Stucki, and Siam@Siam Thailand's Pratarnporn Phornprapha and Somkiat Kantawat



The Kowloon Hotel's Musetta Wong, Harbour Grand Hong Kong's Elaine Chow, B&N Tourism Germany's Thorsten Brinschwitz, Harbour Grand Kowloon's Doris Li, EuroMarketingConnections Germany's Evelyn Schülke, Harbour Plaza Metropolis Hong Kong's Lucetta Chan, Harbour Plaza North Point Hong Kong's Amanda Chan and Harbour Plaza 8 Degrees Hong Kong's Billy Wan



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INDONESIA, THE WORLD'S HEART OF WONDERS

Waters, Land Equally Beautiful

Home to a vast marine territory of about four times of its land or 5.8 millions kilometers square, Indonesia is renowned for its diverse marine treasures and its 81.000-kilometer length coastal line put the archipelago as the world's largest marine country.

As an archipelago with tropical climate and vast water territory as well as beautiful coasts, Indonesia has its unrivalled charm; the waters boast about 28,000 flora species, 350 fauna species, 110 microbes and 600 coral reef species.

There are more than 64 locations of dive and surfing sites scattered on 13 provinces as well as 165 coast destinations nearly in all provinces in the country.

Marine lovers, water sport enthusiasts and those craving for sun-soaking relaxation and tranquil leisure must seriously take note on the offering Indonesia has on its plate: exhilarating dive spots, stunning and well-preserved coral reefs and pristine beaches along



its coastline.

Marine tourism has been included in primary fields in the Ministry of Tourism and Economy Creative's 16 priority destinations to be developed during the period of 2010-2015. It has expected that by 2025 all 80 tourism destinations in the country will have been covered.

The 16 destinations include Lake Toba in North Sumatra, Pangandaran in West Java, the Borobudur-Prambanan areas in Central Java, Yogya-Sleman in Yogyakarta, the Bromo-Tengger-Semeru area in East Java, Lombok and the Rinjani volcano, Flores in East Nusa Tenggara, Wakatobi in Southeast Sulawesi, Toraja in South Sulawesi, the Derawan islands in East Kalimantan, in addition Pulau Weh in Aceh, the Togeian islands in Central Kalimantan, the Thousand Islands and Old Batavia - both in Jakarta, and Bali's southern and northern coasts, as well as around Mount Batur.

The 16 locations are picked out of 80 to become pilot projects on how tourism sector would be managed comprehensively and work closely with other ministries the Public Works Ministry, Transportation Ministry and local governments as well as other non-tourism sector.

Included in the list are Bali's household names like Kuta, Sanur dan Nusadua. The three destinations are great options for those who love wa-

ter sports and beach ambience while sunbathing, watching for sunrise and sunset.

Places like Kuta, Dream Land, Padang-Padang and Medewi have all been popular spots for surfing, while Lombok, Nusa Penida, Tulamben, Pemuteran and Menjangan are among the island's top underwater destinations.

Meanwhile, water sports have been developing well in both Tanjung Benoa and at Mertasari in Sanur, where windsurfing and kite surfing are particularly popular.

For rafting, Tukad Ayung and Telaga Waja are excellent destinations and home to dozens of rafting operators. But Bali has more than just water sports and adventures as it is home to trove unique cultural troves that tourists can get first hand experience and even live in the traditions.

The irresistible Bali may be the gateway to explore Indonesia.

A little bit to the east is banana-shaped Bunaken island, another household name in marine tourism which can be reached on a 45-minute boat ride from Manado, the capital city of North Sulawesi. Bunaken boasts one of Indonesia's most famous diving and snorkeling spots. The park is famed for the clarity of its water and the abundance of coral and fish.

Still in Sulawesi island, welcome to Wakatobi. Located in Southeast Sulawesi, the marine park Wakatobi is

named after the acronym of the four main islands composing the cluster: Wangi-wangi, Kaledupa, Tomia and Binongko. Beside the underwater beauty, Wakatobi also boasts other beauty and richness such as white sandy beach, clear sea water, sunset in every island edge, historical ruins like ancient fortresses and cannon spreading out on the four main islands, old village with its stilt houses and the famous Bajo tribe.

Main activities in Wakatobi range from scuba diving to see the island's underwater paradise, snorkeling, whale and dolphin watching, jet ski, banana boat ride, towed tubing, visiting cultural village to learning Wakatobi traditional dances.

The Wakatobi Islands offer crystal clear pristine waters and a rich bio-diverse underwater life, a true paradise for Divers, as this is one of 3 hearts in the World Coral Triangle that stretches from the Solomon Islands in the Pacific to Wakatobi, and North to the Philippines.

Wakatobi alone is said to have 942 fish species and 750 coral reef species from a total of 850 of world's collection, which, comparing with the two world's famous diving centers, the Caribbean Sea owns only 50 species with 300 coral reef species in the Red Sea, in Egypt.

While you're in Sulawesi island, you should not skip a trip to Toraja land.



Safely protected beyond the lofty mountains and rugged granite cliffs of the central highlands of the island of Sulawesi, are the Toraja people who live in valleys that are lush with green rice terraces and fertile coffee plantations.

Toraja is most well known for its elaborate funeral ceremonies that can take days and involve entire villages. These are not only moments for mourning but are moreover events to renew family ties and to ensure continued unity among villages and communities.

In the easternmost province, there is Raja Ampat in West Papua which has emerged as the new darling in the tourism industry. Translated as Four Kings, the island becomes the ultimate destination for divers as Raja Ampat Marine Park's underwater has a stunning array of well-protected biodiversity. It has been listed in the 10 best diving spots in the world.

According to Conservation International, marine surveys suggest that the marine life diversity in the Raja Ampat area is the highest recorded on Earth. Diversity is considerably greater than any other area sampled in the Coral Triangle composed of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste.

Although accessing the islands is not that difficult because of the ever-growing interest in this spot, it takes some time. It takes six hours flight from Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia to Sorong. Then, taking boat to reach the islands is necessary.

Quoted from the ministry's website www.indonesia.travel, Lake Toba is claimed to be truly natural wonders of the world. The lake is actually a crater as big as Singapore in its center, dubbed as the largest lake in Southeast

Asia and the deepest lake in the world.

Toba is a place to come and sit back, relax and absorb some beautiful pristine scenery. As you sit and take in the view of the picturesque mountains set against the cool clear lake, you will feel the worries of the world melt away. As the lake sits 900 meters above sea level there is a cooler climate here making a refreshing break from the heat, humidity and pollution of the city.

Pangandaran is one of West Java's best kept-secrets as far as international tourists are concerned. Located on a peninsula on the south coast of West Java, about 91 Km from the town of Ciamis, Pangandaran offers uniquely black and white sand, calm waded beaches and spectacular sunsets.

This beautiful peninsula facing the Indian Ocean was once better known as a small fishing place. Pananjung beach, located at the western end of the peninsula, is an ideal place for family activities. Pangandaran also hosts many annual events. One in particular is the International Kite Festival which is held in July every year.

Located just east of Bali, Lombok has been called, "an unspoiled Bali". With beautiful beaches, enchanting waterfalls, the large, looming volcano of Mount Rinjani combined with relatively few tourists, Lombok is truly tropical island paradise.

Fascinating and beautiful Flores is long hidden in the shadows of its more famous neighbor Bali. But Flores is finally emerging as a unique destination of its own with attractive offerings; the lair of the Komodo dragons, wondrous three-colored lake, waterfalls, diving sites to unique traditional rituals.

Flores spells adventure, diving, eco-tours, and mountain climbing interspersed with visits to prehistoric heritage sites, traditional villages and cultural events.

Meanwhile, East Kalimantan is not only about mining and natural resources. In Berau district, the province has a true gem: the Derawan archipelago comprises 31 islands, most well known among these are the islands of Derawan, Maratua, Sangalaki and Kakaban. Here is Indonesia's largest nesting site of the rare and endangered giant green turtles and hawksbill turtles, where one can daily watch turtles lay their eggs in the sand or swim to sea with the turtles. The entire marine conservancy region covers a total area of no less than 1.27 million hectares.

If there are enough time to go mainstream, take Java island where there are boundless choices to pick.

In the border between Yogyakarta and Central Java, the world's biggest Buddhist monument waits to be explored. Borobudur, considered as one of the World's seven wonders, was built in the 9th Century during the reign of the Syailendra dynasty.

The temple sits majestically on a hilltop overlooking lush green fields and distant hills. It covers an enormous area, measuring 123 x 123 meters. Some two-hour drive from Borobudur is Prambanan Temple, the largest Hindu temple in Southeast Asia. The proximity of the two temples speaks volume

about Java, Buddhism and Hinduism lived peacefully next to one another.

Yogyakarta (or Jogjakarta) is known as Neverending Asia for its endless attractions and appeal. As one of Indonesia's 32 provinces, this city is one of the foremost cultural centers of Indonesia. From climbing the magnificent Borobudur temple, visiting the Keraton, -- the Sultan's Palace -- to watching silversmiths produce amazing jewelry at Kotagede, to shopping up a storm at Malioboro road, you'll never be bored in this relatively small yet bustling city.

Moving east to Surabaya. Located some 4 hours drive from Surabaya, the capital of East Java, Mount Bromo is a part of the Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park that covers a massive area of 800 square kilometres. While it may be small when measured against other volcanoes in Indonesia, the magnificent Mt Bromo will not disappoint with its spectacular views and dramatic landscapes. At 2392 meters tall, Mt Bromo is not among the tallest of Indonesia's mountains but its stunning beauty lies in its incredible setting. (Source: *The Jakarta Globe*)





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