



Asia's a longhaul winner

The region's perceived safety and aggressive airline promotions are compelling longhaul travellers to choose Asia as a holiday destination

By Mimi Hudoyo, Dannon Har, S Puvaneswary and Paige Lee Pei Qi

Competitive airfares and concerns over safety issues in the wake of Europe's recent terrorism incidents are driving more longhaul travellers to choose Asia as a preferred holiday destination, according to trade feedback at PATA Travel Mart.

Asia appears to be an unexpected winner resulting from Europe's recent terror woes, Pacto COO Umberto Cadamuro observed, as the Indonesian DMC saw an 80 per cent year-to-date surge in volume from Europe.

"Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Turkey are a no-go. The short-haul operators in Europe are left with just Spain and Greece, so they have to start selling longhaul to survive," he said. "There is always opportunity if you know where to look."

For president of US-based Travelvision Jaishree Mehta, who

deems Europe and Asia as equals in terms of travel costs for American travellers, what makes Asia more attractive now is the perception of Asia as "a safer destination" relative to Europe.

Furthermore, airlines' aggressive promotions as well as the rise of longhaul budget carriers such as Eurowings have greatly boosted the affordability of a vacation in South-east Asia.

"Eurowings' flights to Asia are very popular because Germans love a good deal and are willing to make a last-minute booking," Urs Sandner, managing director, Zarva Travel Management remarked.

In a recent last-minute promotional deal from Germanwings during the low-season month of July, Urs told the *Daily* that he sold out the LCC's Cologne-Phuket flights in just two weeks.

"With LCCs, travellers can

choose between very affordable basic fares and more premium categories (unlike legacy carriers)," he elaborated.

This gels with Cadamuro's observation of an emerging travel class from Europe. "There is a new wave of travellers who could not afford to travel longhaul before, but now they can travel," he added.

Also seeing the relative affordability of Asia is Gene Harley, managing director of Chicago-based Advantage International.

He said: "The taxes for a Europe round trip costs around US\$700 to US\$800 whereas the taxes for a similar trip to Asia is around US\$100 to US\$200.

"A 10-day holiday to Tokyo offers savings of (up to) US\$1,000, compared with a trip to Rome," he elaborated.

Shirish Trivedi, president of Travel Leaders based in Baltimore, said airfares from Washington to London and Rome were almost similar compared with airfares to Bangkok and Singapore – but what gives Asia an advantage is the lower cost of hotels.

He added: "A four-star hotel in Bangkok is 30 per cent cheaper compared with a hotel in London. When you spend 10 days or



Cadamuro: affordable Asia



Tourism music to our ears

Music, camaraderie and a celebratory spirit were in the air at the PTM 2016 opening ceremony on Wednesday, graced by (from left) Malaysia's minister of tourism and culture Mohamed Nazri bin Abdul Aziz, PATA Indonesia Chapter chairman Setyono Djuandi Darmono, PATA chairman Andrew Jones, Indonesia's vice-president Jusuf Kalla and tourism minister Arief Yahya, and Banten deputy governor Rano Karno. Photo by Caleb Richard Lai

more on a holiday, the savings is significant."

Trivedi has seen a 10 per cent increase in interest to Asia, with Cambodia and Myanmar topping the list of favourite Asian destinations.

Overall, trade members credit the Gulf airlines as a game-changer in the longhaul travel landscape by connecting their Middle Eastern home-bases with many cities in European countries.

Outbound travellers from Nice, for example, can now fly directly to the Middle East instead

of transiting in Paris in order to connect to Asia, said Cadamuro.

"Besides cutting flight time, it is also cheaper than the European and major Asian airlines," he said.

This has introduced pressure on legacy airlines to cut down on prices, making it more affordable to fly from Europe to Asia.

And amid the growing German interest in Asia, Sandner wants more budget connections to Asia. He said: "It is a good time for AirAsia X to launch direct flights from Malaysia to Germany to fill the gap that Malaysia Airlines had left behind."

Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Turkey are a no-go. The shorthaul operators in Europe are left with just Spain and Greece, so they have to start selling longhaul to survive.

Umberto Cadamuro, COO, Pacto

Mega transit hub on the rise

By Dannon Har

Just as the Middle Eastern carriers are bridging links between Europe and South and South-east Asia, new longhaul services offered by Chinese carriers too are building China up as a major transit hub into Asia.

Beijing and Shanghai especially represent new – and arguably preferred – alternatives to the traditional transit stops like Tokyo, Seoul and Hong Kong in linking the US and Europe to Asia.

Air China became the first airline to launch a thrice-weekly Shanghai-San Jose service on September 1, bringing the number of China-US routes it operates up to six, the most of any airline worldwide.

Air China, along with other Chinese carriers like China Eastern Airlines as well as Hainan Airlines and its subsidiaries, appear to have succeeded in gaining hub status for China's airports, including emerging ones in Chengdu and Chongqing, said buyers at PATA Travel Mart.

"(Chinese airports are becoming transit hubs) in recent years with the opening of more routes especially by Air China. They have been expanding their network very rapidly and this is good for us," said Liu Shan, sales manager, Asia & Africa Region, CITS.

Bai Jing, director, reservation center division, e-commerce department at CITS said the added

connections and competition from Chinese airlines will only be positive for Chinese outbound travellers.

"With competition there will be improvement. It is also not just about the price competitiveness as travellers look at a multitude of criteria when deciding which airline to take. Repeat travellers too are less price conscious," she said.

Louisa Tsou, president of Ananan Tourist, said Taiwanese carriers have predicted and prepared for the rise of China as a competing hub. "Since 2008, China Airlines and Eva Air have been introducing many new links between Taiwan and China in anticipation of the competi-

tion," she said.

Hence, while flights from South-east Asia to Taiwan have indeed declined due to its compromised trans-Pacific hub status, business has more than made up for itself through connections to China.

Most transit traffic go through Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing into Europe, added Tsou.

Tsou, who is also chairman of the Travel Quality Assurance Association in Taiwan, has seen a 1.8 per cent growth in transit traffic from Taiwan to China in July 2016 compared with the same period last year, and believes growth will only continue.

Unlike Liu's observation that transit passengers from South-east Asia through the Beijing and Shanghai hubs

are on the rise, Chris Ellis, Asia product manager at UK-based Explore Worldwide, believes the increase in connections into China is unlikely to benefit those hoping to visit South and South-east Asia due to the cumbersome routing. Rather, it benefits his European clientele visiting China.

Liu and Bai: growing connections a plus for China's travel market



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Unlocking tourism's local value

Community development to be growth engine for tertiary destinations in Indonesia

By Mimi Hudoyo

Owing to its success in developing and opening up the tourism industry in Flores, international development agency Swisscontact has been tasked by the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism to assist in the development of Toraja (South Sulawesi), Wakatobi (South-east Sulawesi) and Tanjung Puting (Central Kalimantan).

Swisscontact programme manager Ruedi Nuetzi, who oversees the Zurich-based organisation's tourism development programmes in these three destinations, told the *Daily*: "Our interest is to empower the local communities to get the benefits from tourism and give reasons for the young generation to remain in their own areas, instead of migrating to big cities."

Using a destination management model, Swisscontact will place a focus on community-based tourism to develop a diversified portfolio of travel experiences beyond the core attractions to encourage longer stays in the destination. The project, which started in 2014, will run until



Traditional houses in Toraja

Meanwhile, community development will take precedence in Wakatobi, a UNESCO Marine Biosphere Reserve and up-and-coming dive destination in the famed Coral Triangle.

"As a new tourist destination with high-end resorts, there is a gap for more affordable accommodation with acceptable standards (in facilities and service) in Wakatobi," Nuetzi said.

"Apart from the marine attractions, there are other (tourism) potential on land. We want to develop other islands by focusing on community development," he added.

In fact, the Swisscontact homestay project in Wakatobi has started to bear fruit, noted Nadar, head of Wakatobi Tourism and Creative Economy Office.

Nadar shared: "With the assistance of Swisscontact, the community of Kulati Village has come up with marine tourism products to offer visitors. They have homestays, dive sites and guides to take care of travellers."

Following the launch of Kulati Village, next up will be culture and heritage products from Liya Village, he revealed.

2018.

In Tanjung Puting, for example, where the national park is a popular destination for its orangutan conservation, Swisscontact wants to "focus on the potential" outside the national reserve, according to Nuetzi.

"Instead of just one village, we are looking at developing a group of traditional villages to attract tourists," he said.

In Central Kalimantan's capital city of Pangkalan Bun, which is often bypassed by tourists, Swisscontact is aiming to improve the service quality, especially in the hotels, he added.

Doors fly open for business



Indonesia's tourism minister Arief Yahya led the ribbon-cutting ceremony at PATA Travel Mart 2016 yesterday morning, before the day's events got into swing with business sessions and talks. Photo by Caleb Richard Lai

Have a say in PTM dates and city

PATA will survey delegates on when and where they want future PATA Travel Marts (PTM) to take place, with the results influencing the choice of event location from 2018 onwards.

Mario Hardy, PATA CEO, said: "A survey is being circulated to delegates this week and some of the questions will ask about preferred destinations and dates for future PTM."

Explaining the decision, Hardy said the month of September is getting busier every year, making it increasingly difficult to pick a date that does not conflict with other events around the world.

"The decision will be made based (not only) on the different options and availability of the host (destination) but also the opinions from the buyers and sellers," he added.

Welcoming the news, Martin Mashingaidze, CEO of South Africa Touring Service, said: "I think that is a good idea because the destination choice determines where the buyers and sellers will come from."

Iwan Sitompul, special consultant at Platran Hotels & Resorts, is pleased by the prospect of having a say, especially in the PTM dates.

"Having so many events in the same month put us in (a difficult) position to choose and some events will inevitably lose participants," he commented.

Darren Tan, managing director of World Express, offered his two cents: "There should be a balance between what the delegates want and which countries want to bid to host the event." – Mimi Hudoyo



Iwan: problem with too many choices

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Macao International Music Festival

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Magnificent performances by artists from China and the world are set to mesmerise visitors and music enthusiasts at the 30th anniversary edition of Macao's most acclaimed music festival

Be moved by the magic of music this October in Macao when the Macao International Music Festival (MIMF) welcomes the world with a blockbuster line-up under the theme "Glorious 30. The Sinophone Rhapsodies".

Organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, the 30th Macao International Music Festival will kick off on October 1, 2016, bringing together outstanding musicians and ensembles from Russia, the United States of America, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Mongolia, Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao. A total of 27 extraordinary performances from 20 programmes will be presented at this grand annual musical event.

The Festival will open with its own production, joining hands with internationally renowned Italian stage director Giancarlo del Monaco and acclaimed set and costume designer William Orlandi to present Giacomo Puccini's opera in three acts *Turandot* from October 1-4. This production tells the story of the romance of life and death between Chinese



the production is a commemoration of the 400th anniversary of his death.

MIMF 2016 will also feature the Macao International Music Festival Forum and the launch of the 30th Macao International Music Festival Special Commemorative Edition.

Come to Macao this October for a truly extraordinary musical treat!

www.icm.gov.mo/fimm/30/en/



Princess Turandot and Prince Calaf of Tartary.

On October 29-30, renowned American conductor Timothy Brock will lead the Macao Orchestra on the live accompaniment of the silent films "City Lights" and "The Gold Rush" by comedy genius Charlie Chaplin, bringing to a close the MIMF's pearl jubilee at Park of Dr. Carlos d'Assumpção under a starry sky.

Another headline act is the chamber opera *A Dream of Fragrancy*, an adaptation of playwright Tang Xianzu's travel to Macao in 1591. Specially commissioned for the MIMF 2016,



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Snapshots

A brilliant exchange By Caleb Richard Lai

Iskandar Regional Development Authority's Mohamad Rosly Md Selamat, Legoland Malaysia Resort's Thila Munusamy (centre) and Tourism Johor's Amirrul Asyraf Bin Ibrahim



Bali Sinar Mentari Tours & Travel's I Ketut Ardana and Look Asia Holidays Bali's Tanto Ruwiyadi



Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board's (MTPB) Azizah Aziz and Mirza Mohammad Taiyab, Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia's Mohamed Nazri Bin Abdul Aziz and MTPB's Ahmad Esa



E-Da Royal Hotel Taiwan's Jessica Liu, Forte Hotel Group Taiwan's Crystal Lee, Golden Foundation Tours Taiwan's Hsiao Yi-Chi, Ministry of Transportation and Communications Taiwan's Doris Peng, Taiwan Tourism Bureau HK Office's Tony Wu, PATA Chinese Taipei Chapter's Stephen Chang, Hotel & Travel International Marketing Association Taiwan's Mei Chuan Tseng, Travel King Taiwan's Crystal Lin, Edison Travel Service Taiwan's Peter Kuo and Grand Hi-Lai Hotel Taiwan's Pam Chen



Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia's Mohamed Nazri Bin Abdul Aziz, Themed Attractions Resorts & Hotels Malaysia's Kristine Lim and Edward Chin, and MTPB's Mirza Mohammad Taiyab



TTG Asia Media Singapore's Peter Tay and Ar-lene Lee, Indonesia Convention Exhibition's Yohanes Utomo, TTG Asia Media Singapore's Michael Chow, Pacto Indonesia's Halim and TTG Asia Media Singapore's Pierre Quek



The Jayakarta SP Jakarta Hotel & Spa's Agus Zakaria S, and The Jayakarta Suites Bandung's Julianti and H A Kusdianan



Santika Indonesia Hotels & Resorts' Yenny Susanty and team



TurboJet Hong Kong's Alcuin Li, Macao Government Tourism Office's Victor Chan, Isabela Manhão and Viona, and Macau Tower Convention & Entertainment Centre's Simon Chow



Selangor State Secretary office's Ahmad Nazmi Bin Razali, and Tourism Selangor's Khuzaimah Binti Jamaluddin, Noorul Ashikin Bt Mohd Din and Fatimah Husna Binti Razalee



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Fun times ahead

From left: Legoland Water Park in Johor, Malaysia; Universal Studios Singapore brings *Madagascar* characters to life



As theme parks of all brands and types proliferate across Asia, park operators are finding that change is the name of the game.

TTG Show Daily reports

Malaysia

A boost to secondary locales
S Puvaneswary

Fast becoming the theme park capital of South-east Asia, the growing crop of theme parks in Malaysia has enhanced the country as a family-friendly destination and spread tourist footfalls out from Kuala Lumpur to secondary destinations.

Ally Bhoonee, executive director at World Avenues, said: "The opening of new theme parks in Perak and Johor have helped us to sell Malaysia to overseas partners with itineraries that go beyond Kuala Lumpur.

"Theme parks such as Legoland Malaysia Resort and Sanrio Hello Kitty Town have helped promote Johor to families. In the past, Johor used to be a passing destination into Singapore," noted Bhoonee.

"The Lost World of Tambun in Perak has helped us develop one- and two-night itineraries in the state, whereas in the past Ipoh used to be a stopover lunch destination for tours heading to Penang," he added.

"With Movie Animation Park Studios (MAPS) opening in July, it will give us another major attraction to sell in Perak."

Developed to a tune of RM450 million (US\$111.6 million), MAPS is the first animation theme park in Asia with attractions and characters entirely based on cartoon animation themes, according to CEO Darren McLean.

Calvin Ho, senior general manager of Sunway Theme Parks, welcomes the complimentary effect the upcoming MAPS will bring to business at Sunway's Lost World of Tambun and Sunway Lagoon.

He explained: "More marketing dollars invested in attracting tourists to the coun-

try can only be good for the economy. Tourists may want to visit more than one theme park during their entire stay."

As well, John Chan, business development director, Kris International Traveltours, said the recent growth of theme parks linked to international brands such as Nickelodeon, Legoland and Hello Kitty Town will grow a new segment of tourists who do not see shopping as a main draw.

Singapore

Building on family-friendly reputation

Paige Lee Pei Qi

While the cosmopolitan Singapore is renowned to be a shopper's paradise, its appeal as a theme park destination rocketed when Universal Studios Singapore (USS) in Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) debuted in 2010.

According to Michael Chong, manager of global business at Star Holiday Mart, travellers who enjoy theme park attractions in Singapore are mostly families from South-east Asia and China.

Judy Lum, group vice president for sales and marketing with Singapore's Tour East Group, share similar observations: "Most visitors are groups of young people travelling together or multi-generation families from India, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and regional countries.

"Singapore's close proximity allows them to have holidays at theme parks of international standards as most Asian working class do not have long annual holidays to travel to the US or Europe to enjoy such theme parks," she elaborated.

Apart from USS, the eight-hectare Marine Life Park in RWS has pulled in large numbers of tourists too.

Leong Yue Weng, general manager of interactive indoor edutainment centre

KidZania Singapore, which opened at Palawan Beach on Sentosa Island earlier this year, said theme park operators are enticed by Singapore's positioning as a family-friendly destination.

However, competition is just at bay. Said Star Holiday Mart's Chong: "Singapore faces regional and destination competition for theme parks – an example is Shanghai Disneyland which will compete with Singapore for theme park tourists."

Hence, to sustain Singapore's appeal as a theme park destination, Lum urged theme parks to always "reinvent and refresh" their attractions and keep costs "affordable for surrounding countries" as the Singapore dollar is just too strong against the regional currencies.

Japan

Regular updates fan domestic love affair

Julian Ryall

The Japanese love affair with theme parks started with the opening of Tokyo Disneyland in 1983. Since then, theme parks have grown to become a key part of the domestic tourism industry, with three parks – Tokyo Disneyland, Tokyo DisneySea and Universal Studios Japan – in the world's top five attractions by attendance.

Japan witnessed a boom in theme parks in the 1980s, Motohisa Tachikawa, spokesman for JTB, pointed out, but not all the smaller ones survived the economic downturn of the following decade.

"Parks need to open something new every year or, at most, every two years because that is what keeps visitors return-

ing regularly," he said. "Repeat visitors are critically important and if some feel that one visit was sufficient, they won't want to return."

Universal Studios Japan has experienced just that surge in visitor numbers. The opening of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in 2014 led to a 28 per cent increase in admissions over the following year.

Huis Ten Bosch, the Dutch theme park in Kyushu, opened their new Kingdom of Robots attraction in July, and is a move that "will definitely bring in new visitors", said Kotaro Takada, director of the corporate planning department.

"Last year, around 200,000 of our guests were from overseas and we're seeing foreign visitor numbers increasing by as much as 10 per cent a year," said Chanmum Om, who oversees the park's foreign promotion efforts. Key to that has been the establishment of offices in South Korea and Taiwan to bring in guests.

Foreign visitors have also helped to increase overall numbers to Japan's theme parks, Johta Takahashi, USJ's spokesman said, with the sector in general benefitting from an increase in LCCs flying into Japan, relaxation on visa regulations and the relative weakness of the yen in recent months.

At the same time, more Japanese have been visiting after being dissuaded from travelling abroad due to recent terrorist incidents, primarily in European cities.

Theme parks by the numbers

7,400 yen

The price, equivalent to US\$71.50, of a single-day ticket for adults to Tokyo Disneyland, up 500 yen from last year

US\$54

The cost of a one-day pass to Universal Studios Singapore for an adult

120ha

The size of Universal Studios in Beijing, reportedly the biggest in the world

7.5 million

The record attendance for Hong Kong Disneyland in 2014

RM450 million

The cost to build MAPS in Malaysia in ringgit, equivalent to US\$111 million

China

Theme park boom

Caroline Boey

International theme park operators continue to make a beeline for China as the country becomes a key target market, with Italian luxury car manufacturer Ferrari the latest to announce plans to build a branded theme park in China.

For now, all eyes are on the recently opened Shanghai Disney Resort, which is three times the size of the 28ha Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (HKDL).

This will set a new benchmark for theme parks and add a new international dimension to China's offerings, according to Joy Liao, sales director, Inbound Center, Century Holiday International Travel Group.

Kris Van Goethem, managing director, Asian Trails China, said it would be logical for the domestic market to shift focus to the Shanghai Disney Resort.

"It is the first park of such high international standard to open here. It is also more expensive for the Chinese to travel (to Hong Kong for HKDL) compared with domestic flights to Shanghai."

A Legoland park is also currently being built in Shanghai by Merlin Entertainments, which already has five attractions in China, with another two (Madame Tussauds and Sea Life aquarium in Chongqing) due to open soon.

Opening in 2019 will be the Universal Studios in Beijing – the third in Asia after Osaka and Singapore – and at 120ha, it is reportedly the biggest in the world, according to a China National Tourism Administration report.

The homegrown theme park scene, meanwhile, is dominated by Chime-long Group and Overseas Chinese Town (OCT) Group.

Guangzhou Chimelong Tourist Resort is the group's first world-class comprehensive resort housing several of China's top theme parks such as Chimelong Paradise, Chimelong International Circus, Chimelong Water Park and Chimelong Safari Park.

OCT has established a network of theme parks across China over the past two decades, including Shenzhen's Win-

dow of the World (which showcases replicas of world-famous icons) and China's first amusement park chain under the Happy Valley brand.

Violet Wang, destination manager at Pacific World, opined that China's massive domestic market will assure business for the various theme parks in southern China and the Yangtze River Delta.

Hong Kong

Buckling up for rollercoaster ride

Prudence Lui

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (HKDL) and Ocean Park Hong Kong saw visitor numbers drop last year, but players are downplaying speculations that the opening of Shanghai Disney Resort may further dampen business.

HKDL's sales director for Hong Kong and International, Martin Leung, said: "We see the opening of new theme parks in the region as advantageous because their presence will help create top-of-mind awareness of theme parks and the Disney brand among guests."

Similarly, chief executive of Ocean Park Hong Kong, Tom Mehrmann, believes that more theme parks in China will cater to the rising number of the Chinese middle class while strengthening the region's appeal for longhaul tourists.

"A critical mass of attractions will actually (improve the appeal) of tourist destinations, which is exactly what has been happening in southern China that includes Hong Kong and Macau," he said.

Still, it seems the industry senses competition from neighbouring destinations and has sought to add new attractions to keep the visitor experience fresh.

For instance, HKDL's Star Wars-themed special events was introduced this summer, and offered rides such as Hyper-space Mountain.

Ocean Park recently launched free Wi-Fi service and has in the pipeline, two new hotels – Hong Kong Ocean Park Marriott Hotel and The Fullerton Hotel @ Ocean Park; scheduled for completion by 2017 and 2020 respectively – and the 64,381m² Ocean Park Water World (2H2018).

W Travel, managing director, Wing

Wong, feels that the theme park market is already mature. "There is not much room for big expansion given (Hong Kong's) shortage of land. I believe there won't be any dramatic growth of visitors but new facilities may help to drive more visitors."

Macau

Casinos still primary attraction

Prudence Lui

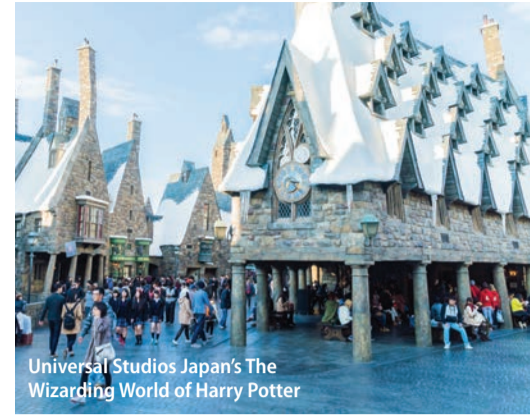
The theme park industry is unlikely to exist in Macau, as the small territory – with a minuscule population of just 650,000 – is already dominated by the gaming industry and its integrated resorts, said observers.

John Ap, visiting professor at the Institute for Tourism Studies, said: "The current lull in the casino business would not provide the impetus or likely business environment to warrant development of any large-scale theme park that would be financially viable."

"What potential exists for Macau are family entertainment centres (FECs). Studio City is one of the first casinos to introduce this concept with its current Batman Dark Ride, Golden Reel ferris wheel and Warner Bros Fun Zone. It is expected other casinos will follow suit."

However, FECs remain secondary, not drawcard attractions, and this is what Macau will be primarily limited to, he added.

Things might change with the debut of Macau's first theme park, Planet J. Armed



Universal Studios Japan's The Wizarding World of Harry Potter

with Magic Scroll – a smartphone loaded with apps and connected to a master computer – participants can adopt fantasy personae to act out a series of customised challenges to drive away malevolent forces from the mythical Stone Kingdom.

On the other hand, CITS Macau's international department manager Cooper Zhang thinks Macau could have emulated Hong Kong in the theme park field.

"Macau needs (theme parks) to draw more youth and family visitors. Since land is scarce here, the scale can't compare to Hong Kong but in terms of creativity, it's possible to focus on educational and cultural element given the existing commercial tourism offers," he said.

Gray Line Tours, managing director, Andy Wu, concurred: "In the past, all attention went to the fast-growing gaming industry and other business sectors were neglected. Now, the pace of the gaming industry has slowed and the government has stressed on the diversification of tourism offerings so I believe more opportunities for theme park development in future."

Coming soon

Legoland Korea, Chuncheon Legoland is slated to debut in South Korea come 2017, after Merlin Entertainments – the global park operator powerhouse behind the franchise – entered into a US\$270 million investment with a South Korean property company. The development is likely to be the world's largest Legoland at a staggering 1.3 million m², more than double the size of the Windsor franchise in the UK.

20th Century Fox World, Genting, Malaysia Set to open in late 2017 in Resorts World Genting, the world's first film-inspired theme park will boast 25 different rides based on popular Fox movies such as *Rio*, *Titanic*, *Planet of the Apes* and *Alien vs Predator*.

Universal Studios Beijing, China The US\$8 billion complex will launch in 2019, with a considerable portion of its attractions and rides built indoors to circumvent Beijing's harsh winters. The Lost World and Ancient Egypt are some of the Hollywood-inspired themes planned for the 120ha park.

Ubisoft, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Scheduled to open in Kuala Lumpur in 2020, the 10,000m² indoor park will offer virtual reality simulations, rides and shows built around Ubisoft's games and characters. The development is the outcome of a partnership between Ubisoft and R Segari Group, which also co-developed the MAPS in Perak at the end of this year.

Nintendo Theme Park in Universal Studios Japan, Osaka The world's very first Nintendo theme park has been planned for a 2020 launch in Universal Studios Osaka, in time for the Tokyo Olympics. The US\$350 million development aims to bring to life memorable Nintendo characters such as the Super Mario brothers.



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Concept art of the brand-new Rainforest Park



Mandai Safari Park Holdings

Mandai precinct is poised to become an eco-tourism hub with five wildlife parks, writes **Paige Lee Pei Qi**

Singapore will soon be home to a 126ha wildlife and nature precinct dedicated to eco-tourism come 2023.

The area currently houses the Singapore Zoo, River Safari and Night Safari. But from 2020 onwards, they will be joined by two new attractions – the Bird Park, which will be relocated from Jurong, and the all-new Rainforest Park.

Mike Barclay, group chief executive of Mandai Safari Park Holdings (MSPH), said: “We want to give visitors a nature and wildlife destination that they can call their own. Visitors have asked for more novel, engaging and immersive experiences. We hope the new Mandai nature precinct will provide all that and more.”

He added: “Our vision is to create an integrated nature and wildlife destination, nestled within our bustling city for all Sin-

gaporeans and tourists to enjoy. Generations of Singaporeans have grown up with Jurong Bird Park and the (existing) wildlife parks in Mandai. This project provides an opportunity for renewal, and to deepen our collective affinity with the nature and wildlife of our region.”

When completed, visitors will be able to stroll on aerial walkways at the 12.5ha Rainforest Park, or relax in pods and watch birds take flight in nine aviaries that feature different landscapes – such as a wetland or bamboo forest – at the 17ha Bird Park. The Bird Park will also hold a breeding and research facility, which aims to increase the populations of critically endangered species such as the Bali mynah, black-winged starling and blue-crowned laughing thrush.

Also, Mandai nature precinct’s surrounds will also boast nature trails,

VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets do you think will perform best this year and why?



Dominic Ong, general manager, Star Holiday Mart

At present, India is growing stronger for us. Indian travellers are staying even longer with an average of four nights (thanks to the availability of direct) flight connections. The basic packages they enjoy are those that include Sentosa Island, Universal Studios and Night Safari.



Daniel Goh, manager, Siam Express

I am confident in the Chinese market, especially the high-end FIT travellers. This will be a strong performing market because of the Chinese yuan which is slightly stronger (this year) as compared to the previous year.

boardwalks, gardens, waterways and playgrounds.

According to MSPH, the hub is being designed to be in harmony with nature. The two new parks will be developed on previously occupied land and measures will be taken to minimise impact on the flora and fauna in the area.

Meanwhile, the main hub area will feature an indoor nature-themed education centre and hold exhibitions aimed at raising awareness and appreciation for the region’s biodiversity and natural heritage.

Moreover, an eco-link bridge spanning Mandai Lake Road will also be built. This bridge will allow animals to move between the central and northern reaches of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

Sleeping under the stars could become viable for visitors who intend to spend a night or two in Mandai, as eco-friendly accommodation options such as tents, camps and family rooms are being considered.

Applauding the new eco-tourism hub, GTMC Travel’s CEO Samson Tan, said: “This new hub will help capture tourists because it become a one-stop wildlife attraction hub. It will help tourists stay for

a full day or (even spend a) night there.”

According to Judy Lum, Tour East’s senior vice president sales & marketing international market, family groups are usually the segment that is most attracted to wildlife attractions, and the Night Safari is a big draw especially for visitors from India, China and Japan.

“I am excited about this impending project. It will be a wonderful place for visitors to explore and cultivate care for nature, and it is educational for both children and adults alike,” Lum enthused.

Currently, MSPH is also exploring a range of options with the Singapore government to improve accessibility to Mandai. These include introducing shuttle buses from the upcoming Springleaf MRT station and direct bus services from areas that are not well-connected to Mandai.

PRODUCTS

1 KidZania Singapore

KidZania Singapore, an interactive indoor edutainment centre, has opened at Palawan Beach on Sentosa Island. The 7,600m² facility features 80 role-playing activities suitable for children between the ages of four and 14. They will be exposed to real-life situations and learn about how a society functions in the process. Some of the activities on offer include piloting an aeroplane, putting out fires and working as a CSI agent.

2 AJ Hackett Sentosa

Bungy operator AJ Hackett International is constructing a 50m-tall bungy tower on Sentosa Island, the first of its kind for Singapore.

The custom-built tower will feature several experiences such as the Double Bungy, a 47m-high jump deck; Duo Giant Swings, the world’s first double swings where two groups of participants race each other to the ground; and a Vertical Skywalk where guests can walk 44m down the centre tower shaft.

There is also a 40m-long vertical Sky-bridge that will allow participants of all



Hotel Vagabond

ages to walk along an open-air platform to take in the sights and watch jumpers take the leap. The tower is scheduled to be completed by end 2016.

3 Hotel Vagabond

This luxury boutique hotel by Garcha Hotels is the first hotel in Asia to feature interiors by French designer Jacques Garcia.

The 41-room property is also the only hotel of its kind to offer a rotational Artist in Residence programme, where

artists will be invited to apply for residences up to three months to showcase their work.

4 M Social Singapore

Millennium Hotels and Resorts has launched a new lifestyle hotel brand in the country with the opening of M Social Singapore in Robertson Quay.

Featuring a Philippe Starck-designed interior, the 239-key has a mix of duplex-style lofts and terraced rooms. Facilities

Destination in numbers

\$700 million

The amount injected into a new five-year tranche of the Tourism Development Fund, equivalent to US\$523 million

5,533,637

The total number of international visitors from January to April 2016, a 14.1 year-on-year increase

\$242.40

The average hotel room rate from January to March 2016, equivalent to US\$179, compared to S\$244.60 throughout 2015

include a lobby with self check-in kiosks, a swimming pool, fitness centre, and a communal restaurant-bar Beast & Butterflies.

5 Singapore Airlines’ Singapore-San Francisco direct flight

Singapore Airlines will launch a non-stop service between Singapore and San Francisco, starting from October 23, 2016.

Flights will depart San Francisco in the morning, arriving in Singapore in the early evening. Return flights will depart Singapore in the morning and arrive in San Francisco also in the morning to allow for connections to other cities.



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Destination **South Korea**

Tourism banks on star power



Bukchon Hanok village, Seoul

Hit Korean dramas, old and new, continue to lure eager K-pop fans to the destination, writes **Julian Ryall**

South Korea is invoking the pulling power of one of its most famous movie stars to reel in a new generation of foreign visitors.

Actor Song Joong-ki, who plays the lead role of military captain Yoo Si-jin in the internationally acclaimed drama, *Descendants of the Sun*, is to serve as the Korean Tourism Honorary Ambassador for 2016, with the high-profile campaign due to commence before the end of July.

The campaign will include television advertisements that feature many of the locations used in the series, as well as print advertising.

Descendants of the Sun has been sold to 32 countries, including Japan, Germany and New Zealand but it has been most successful in China, where the show has attracted a remarkable 2.4 billion views on the IQiyi.com video streaming website since it was first aired in late February.

The South Korean tourist industry's utilisation of the nation's booming K-Pop sector has proven an effective tactic in previous years, with last year's *Korea. Your Story* tourism campaign, starring ac-

tor Lee Min-ho, being watched 37 million times, the highest ever for a tourism promotion ad anywhere in the world.

And even though *Winter Sonata* first aired in 2002, seven per cent of all foreign visitors to South Korea are still flocking to Nami Island, where part of the series was filmed. More than 30 per cent of visitors from South-east Asia had Nami Island on their itineraries last year.

"For visitors from places where these TV series have been aired, the (film) locations are must-see sites during their visits to (South) Korea," said Joseph Kang, executive director of Seoul-based Kim's Travel. "Right now, this industry is seeing a lot of inbound tourists from other parts of Asia, but by far the majority are from China."

Some 6.1 million Chinese visited South Korea in 2015, accounting for 46.1 per cent of all foreign arrivals.

In the first six months of 2016, more than eight million tourists set foot on South Korea, up 21 per cent on the same period last year, according to the Korea Tourism Organisation. Chinese visitors alone were up 27 per cent.

The figures put the nation on track to hitting its annual target of 16.5 million arrivals for the full year.

"The industry is definitely picking up," said Eric Funtowicz, director of sales and marketing for AccorHotels Korea. "The early part of 2015 was difficult because of MERS, but we got back to growth in October. Since then we have seen our growth increasing between 10 and 15 per cent."

Around 70 per cent of AccorHotels' guests are domestic travellers – the industry has seen a surge in people who live in Seoul booking into a high-end city centre hotel for a weekend break – but the majority of the company's foreign guests are from China, Funtowicz said.

"The Korean wave has been good for (tourism), but I'm hoping that South Korea can broaden its appeal in the coming year, particularly as it will be hosting the FIFA Under-20 World Cup from May next year and then the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang," he added.

Others in the industry are calling for efforts to promote destinations away from Seoul.

"There are lots of hidden treasures off the beaten track and sectors such as eco-tourism are growing rapidly, particularly in the south," said Seo Tae-won, director of Suhyun Tour.

VIEWPOINT

Which source markets will perform best for you this year and why?



Oh Dong-hee, sales executive, The Koreana Hotel, Seoul

The Chinese market is without a doubt the most important. I would say that 75 per cent of our guests this year will be from China, with the Japanese accounting for the second-largest number of overseas guests. The Chinese have money and they're very keen to travel.

Destination in numbers

2.1 million

The average amount, in won (US\$1,874), spent by each Chinese visitor to Seoul, making the Chinese the biggest spenders in South Korea

724,000

The number of foreigners who arrived in South Korea on cruise ships between January and June, up 88 per cent from the same period last year

13.3 million

The number of arrivals to South Korea in 2015, down 6.3 per cent on the previous year, primarily due to the outbreak of MERS during the peak summer months

But there are hurdles that need to be overcome before many of these areas are ready to welcome visitors from overseas, he warned, such as upgrading accommodation to standards that international tourists expect.

PRODUCTS

1 K-Style Hub

Opened since April, this education and experience centre near Myeongdong district offers a range of hands-on programmes that showcase different aspects of South Korean culture. Within sits the Korean Culinary Centre which occupies the entire top floor of the hub. Guests can sign up for lesson on preparing local cuisine. Up to 40 participants can be accommodated at any one time for sessions ranging from 100 minutes to two hours, depending on the type of food being prepared.

2 Air Seoul

South Korea's newest low-cost carrier took to the skies in mid-July, with its first service flying between Seoul's Gimpo Airport and the southern island of Jeju. Affiliated with Asiana Airlines, the airline intends to begin international flights from October, with routes to China, Japan and Malaysia planned.

3 Hanbok perks in Jongno

The Jongno district in central Seoul has introduced a system that gives out 10 to 20 per cent discount at several restaurants, to anyone who dons a traditional *hanbok*. Some of the city's most famous sites are in Jongno, including Gyeongbok Palace, the Bukchon Hanok Village and the Insadong shopping area. Tourism authorities aim to steadily increase the number of restaurants participating in the campaign over the coming months.

4 L7 Myeongdong

This new lifestyle hotel sits close some of the major shopping destinations in Seoul, such as Lotte Duty-free Shops, as well as key tourist attractions such as Gyeongbokgung Palace and Namsan Mountain. Targeting young and trendy travellers, the interior of the hotel features bold designs while facilities are also built with the hip folks in mind. Guestrooms are bright and chic, and the suites comes with delightful splashes of colour. The hotel offers Long

Day Foot Spa on the rooftop on the 21st storey where views of Namsan Mountain can be enjoyed, Floating rooftop bar, Charlotte restaurant, and even a K-Pop memorabilia vending machine.

5 Nodeul Island

The government has announced plans to turn the unused island in the middle of the Han River, which flows through central Seoul, into a destination for live music and arts festivals. Nodeul island will have indoor and outdoor theatres, parks, farmers' markets, cafes and ecology centres. The city had previously planned to build an opera house on the island, but that fell through due to a shortage of funds. This time, however, the city has committed to covering the total 43.6 billion won cost of the project.

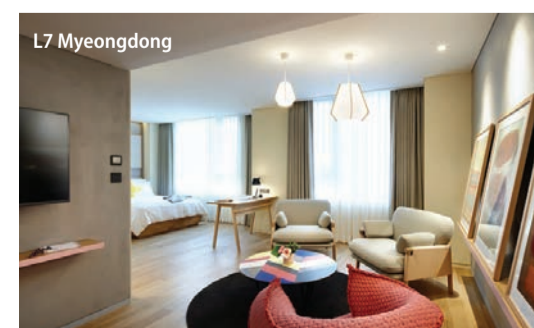
6 SM Duty Free

Insadong welcomed this brand new seven-storey shopping complex in February this year. Run jointly by 11 small and medium

enterprises, SM Duty Free tantalises shoppers with both foreign and local brands that cover a variety of products, from beauty and fashion to electronics and toys.

7 Walkerhill's capsule hotel

SK Network's Walkerhill is opening a 67-room capsule hotel at Incheon International Airport before end-2016. The capsules, which will each have a private shower and toilet, will cost just 8,000 won (S\$7) per hour.



L7 Myeongdong

Destination Laos

Raising the country's profile

Asian arrivals have been increasing but concern about the destination's quality abounds. By **Bernie Rosenbloom**

Tham Ting caves near Luang Prabang



Destination in numbers

The recent influx of Chinese and Koreans into Laos have forced members of the trade to reassess the situation.

“Both the Chinese and Koreans come with a very different approach,” said Luang Prabang View Hotel’s general manager John Williams. He said the main concern is “overkill” on the city, though these markets fill rooms during the generally slow Green Season from April to October.

Exo Travel’s sales manager Laos Jason Rolan further warned that waves of low-spending, high volume Chinese groups may dilute the destination’s quality.

“This is changing the dynamic of tourism in Laos from being one that was slightly more upscale and boutique, to something a bit less so.”

But five-star Luang Say Residence’s general manager Rodolphe Gay has a different view.

“The arrival of Asian markets is a welcome change to the luxury sector. In other markets there may be cultural challenges, but in the high-end market, we find Asians

13.7%

The percentage of international visitors to the country, who account for 50 per cent of the tourism revenue

29%

The percentage of Thai visitors to the country. To attract more Thais, Laos is opening more border crossings, and simplifying access by car

72%

The year-on-year increase in the percentage of Korean arrivals. This makes it Laos’ fourth largest market and third in revenue

polite, educated, and respectful.”

On the luxury front, the country will have three more five-star hotels this year – Crowne Plaza Vientiane, and the Pullman and Serai hotel in Luang Prabang.

PRODUCTS

1 The Lao Mekong Explorer

Mekong Cruises is heading inland with the two-day Lao Mekong Explorer. The tour starts in Luang Prabang, weaves through Sainyabuli Province by road, cruises the Mekong, and finishes in Luang Prabang.

The Sainyabuli leg stops at a Tai Lue village and ancient temple with story-telling murals, continues through the mountains to a rare Phai village, before making a stop at Sainyabuli Town and Kamcham Waterfall.

2 Bounmi Cruises

Bounmi, an 18m-long traditional Luang Prabang slow boat fitted with bean bags and cushions, started sailing the Mekong in December 2015.

Guests on the the Bounmi Freestyle cruise can charter the *Bounmi* by the hour and customise a cruise to their own interests and schedule. Another popular itinerary, Kuang Si in Style, calls on the Butterfly

Park, Free the Bears Sanctuary, and Kuang Si Waterfalls.

The onboard menu ranges from a la carte dishes and beach barbecues to Lao snacks and alcoholic and soft drinks.

3 Saffron Coffee Tour

Saffron Coffee now teaches tourists how their social enterprise benefits Luang Prabang farmers at their environmentally-friendly, organic coffee farm. Here at this farm, farmers grow their own seed beds and sell it to Saffron.

The half-day agro-tour visits Saffron’s training farm, and shows the process from sprouts to the November-February harvest. Visitors also watch and learn as farmers hand sort beans into grades. Moreover, on the farm all waste is reused.

4 Khiri Travel Laos

Khiri Travel Laos recently discovered a secluded Mekong sandbank, and is now

VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets do you think will perform best this year and why?



Markus Neuer, director and co-owner, Tiger Trail

I have been seeing a steady increase of middle-class Thai FITs as well as Korean, Japanese, and Singaporean travellers. I also expect the Hong Kong market to perform well, and Hong Kong visitors to South-east Asia are expected to grow 60 per cent this year, as new connections by HK Express will create an easier and cheaper, yet more spontaneous access to Laos.

Andreas Hofmann, Laos managing director, Asian Trails

Asian Trails focuses on leisure travellers and for 2016, we will continue to rely on traditional performers – the UK, Germany, Switzerland and France. However, the global crisis is not helping. But Israel is a positive surprise and they are growing steadily from a low base – travellers from Israel like the mix of culture, nature, good fresh food, as well as that Laos is a safe destination.



“The 198-room Crowne Plaza Vientiane is the first international brand with full MICE facilities in the capital,” said general manager Oliver Horn.

Meanwhile, the 123-key Pullman Luang Prabang covers 16ha of countryside, and worked with P49 Deesign to ensure the resort village met UNESCO guidelines while providing a modern interior.

“We’re focusing on younger travellers who mix business with leisure,” said general manager Arnaud Rouchon.

Lastly, the Serai hotel – on the site of the former Phousy Hotel – wants to “hit the ground running when it opens”, said general manager Gary Tyson.

Arrivals in Laos jumped 13.9 per cent from 4.16 million in 2014 to 4.68 million last year, topping predictions by more than five per cent, according to the Lao Tourism Development Department.

Top market Thailand increased its numbers by 14 per cent to 2.32 million, while third place China showed a solid gain of 21 per cent and South Korea leapt to four place with 165,328, a 72 per cent spike. Overall, tourism revenue jumped 13 per cent to US\$725 million.

Saly Phimphinith, director general of the Lao Tourism Marketing Department, said: “In 2015, Korea and China outper-

formed expectations.”

However, figures from 1Q2016 were less robust. Overall arrivals dipped six per cent year on year, with Thailand’s number shrinking 13 per cent, and Korea and China growing at a six and 13 per cent respectively.

To raise Laos’ profile among the Thais, Phimphinith said the marketing department is working with the Tourism Authority of Thailand to organise fam trips for travel agents. Also, the department continues to upgrade the national tourism website, and recently redesigned its promotional materials.

Moreover, Phimphinith realises that Laos is a secondary destination, but notes: “Our four bridges with Thailand and new roadways connecting to our four neighbouring countries perfectly position Laos for multi-nation itineraries.”

When asked about new air routes in Asia, Phimphinith said: “Lao Airlines is now focusing on China and Korea.”

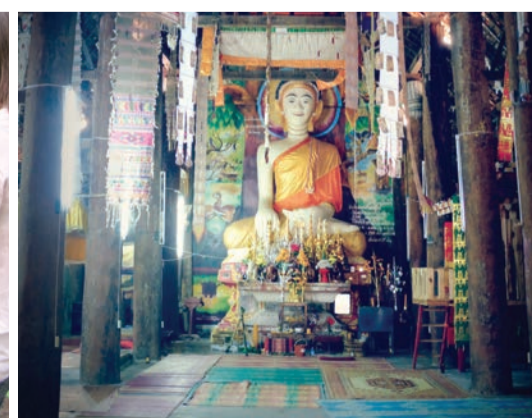
Meanwhile, Air Asia launched a daily Bangkok-Vientiane-Luang Prabang service earlier this year. SilkAir and HK Express plan to commence Luang Prabang services from their national hubs in October. Domestically, Lao Skyway now flies to less-travelled destinations from Vientiane.

offering a three-hour Luang Prabang Authentic Picnic Experience.

On this tour, guests board a private boat for a 25-minute cruise, and cruise past lush scenery for a genuine local picnic on the isolated sandy bank. Prepared before arrival, the picnic spot includes comfortable

rugs, cushions and traditional umbrellas to provide shade.

The entire experience is presented in an authentic yet sustainable fashion, where local family restaurants prepare the lunches, thus benefitting from the tour. Also, no plastic or paper napkins are used.



From left: Saffron Coffee Tour; The Lao Mekong Explorer

Destination Thailand

Coming of age tale continues

With several of its cities already regarded as mature destinations, Thailand is beginning its transformation into a luxurious destination – led by a vocal tourism body with a gleaming strategy. **Michael Sanderson** reports



Park Hyatt swimming pool

With ASEAN neighbours snapping at its heels, Thailand is repositioning itself towards high-end, “quality” travellers and is getting a suite of new luxury hotels to match.

In July, governor of the Tourism Au-

thority of Thailand (TAT) announced a change in marketing position from a “value-for-money to value-for-experience” destination.

Luxury hotels will add to this transition, with a new Park Hyatt about to open in the heart of Bangkok, while recent

openings and renovations in Chiang Mai and Phuket put the focus firmly on the traveller willing to pay for indulgence.

Bangkok-based Exo Travel said it was trying to push the Park Hyatt and Riva Arun in Bangkok, Chiang Mai’s Akya Manor, Phuket’s Nai Harn and Keemala and the Hloyo mud house in Mae Salong.

Citing the TAT’s successful use of themed marketing campaigns in recent years, Exo added it has participated in a TAT project to develop marketing material to appeal to luxury travellers.

“This included shooting both a short and long-length video at particular participating hotels and places,” an Exo spokeswoman said. “The campaign was successful and it worked well for us because it (targeted) the high-end traveller niche.”

Exo is also keen to join a sports tourism campaign the TAT is starting to push, which will emphasise the country’s facilities for golf, water sports, tennis and yoga/pilates.”

Bill Barnett, managing director of hospitality consultancy C9 Hotelworks, pointed to the resurgence of business travellers and the MICE sector after “some dark days in 2014” as a sign of the country’s strong position.

Barnett said resorts had rebounded, with improvements from the Eastern European and Russian markets in the first five months of this year compared to the same time in 2015. Phuket alone has recorded 19 per cent growth in domestic and international passenger arrivals at the airport for the first five months, which was on par with Bali at 19.7 per cent and well ahead of Hong Kong, which had suffered lower year-on-year trade with the Chinese market.

“(The situation in Hong Kong) pushes the message back, how reliant we are on the China market,” Barnett said. “I hate to be Phuket-specific but I looked at the Phuket figures and it wasn’t just the Chinese that were growing this year, we saw proportionate growth against all the markets of 19 per cent. So it’s not just a China story.”

Destination in numbers

\$5.7 billion

The amount in US dollars that could be spent on the expansion of Thailand’s six largest airports

29.2%

The YOY increase in number of passengers flying between Suvarnabhumi and Hong Kong in 2015, according to the World Air Transport Statistics. Three million made the trip in 2015

16.67 million

The number of tourist arrivals in 1H2016, up 13% on last year, putting Thailand on track to pass 30 million for the year

But Thailand’s quest for more leisure tourists will not be without challenge.

Firstly, the increase in flights to Cambodia and Vietnam meant Thailand faces greater competition across the region.

Barnett added Vietnam is a force to be reckoned with when it comes to competing for tourists. “We saw Vietnam bottom out a few years ago, (but) it’s rising again now and becoming more of a competitive force to Thailand’s traditional leisure market. That’s something we have to be aware of,” Barnett said.

Outside the region, Brexit gives reason to be optimistic. “Everyone’s bating their breath, waiting to see what’s going to happen with Brexit and people are viewing 2016 with cautious optimism. Our expectations are for growth. (Although) we are widely leveraged in Asia...and are not entirely dependent on the impact of Brexit, sometimes when global events happen they do have an impact here in Thailand. You can’t be ignorant of what’s happening in the broader world.”

VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets will perform best for you this year and why?



Lisa Fitzell, group managing director of Diethelm Travel Group

Our highest performing markets include Russia, Eastern Europe and India (a new market for us). The US is also showing good signs of growth. And while the UK has performed well this year, we’re expecting it to flatten a little as a result of the recent Brexit decision. The Latin American market has been challenging this year, due to the economic issues in Brazil, but we are seeing solid growth in forward bookings so we believe it will remain flat.

Boontawee (Max) Jantasuan, managing director of Events Travel Asia

For us, APAC is still the majority – we get a lot of requests from Singapore but not so much Hong Kong or Malaysia. Australia and America are doing very well too. For the US, we’re quite fortunate to have a direct contact with an American corporate and PCO to hold events in Asia, not just Thailand, so we’re getting ongoing support from them for four or five events a year.



PRODUCTS

1 Amara Bangkok Hotel

The Singapore luxury hotel brand’s first foray into Bangkok comes in the Surawong neighbourhood, parallel to the business district of Silom and Sathon roads. With 250 rooms and suites, a restaurant, a rooftop bar on the 26th floor and an infinity pool, the hotel also features two ballrooms and function rooms plus an executive club floor and lounge. Unusually, Amara offers a 24-hour boutique mini bar whereby guests can select their desired food and beverages at convenience store prices.

3 Boxtel

Located within Suvarnabhumi Airport, Boxel offers solo travellers soundproof, non-smoking, air-conditioned rooms, each just 4m² in size. Each room comes with an adjustable work station and free Wi-Fi. A wake-up service is available to ensure flights are not missed, but guests

are required to use the airport’s toilet facilities. Four-hour stays start from 1,250 baht (US\$35.80).

2 Away Chiang Mai

Away Chiang Mai Hot Springs Resort opened in March, located close to a jungle, a national park and caves. With 34 rooms and a 100m swimming pool, Away also offers shuttle services to the airport, a 30-minute drive away, and the San Kamphaeng hot springs. Managed by Bespoke Hospitality Management Asia, the hotel is one of five resorts under the Away brand in Thailand.

4 The Nai Harn

After 18 months of extensive renovations, the Royal Phuket Yacht Club has transformed into The Nai Harn luxury resort in Phuket. The only hotel directly on the Nai Harn beach, all 130 rooms and suites have Andaman Sea views while the 50m



wide rooftop can be used for weddings or other events. While there are two meeting rooms and flexible outdoor space for the business-minded, a sense of luxury comes from the beachside butler service, private transport (limousine, helicopter or motor-yacht) and spa therapies.

5 Phuket Marriott Resort and Spa Nai Yang Beach

A five-minute drive from Phuket International Airport, the country’s newest Mar-

riott hotel is on a secluded beach in the island’s northwest. The 180 guestrooms range from 46m² garden view suites to two-bedroom villas on the beachfront. Several rooms have direct access to the pool and all have high-speed internet access, international satellite TV and safes. There are four restaurant and bar options, including one on the beach highlighting seafood, plus fitness, children’s and spa facilities. Special opening rates apply for bookings made before October 31.

Destination India

A state of constant worries

Trade urges a more aggressive tourism ministry, new products and improved reputation, writes **Rohit Kaul**

Stakeholders of India's travel and tourism industry are a worried lot today. The lack of an aggressive marketing campaign by the Indian Ministry of Tourism coupled with the absence of new tourism products are likely to dent inbound tourism performance this tourist season beginning October.

Subhash Goyal, chairman of STIC Travel Group, said: "Even though the ministry shows an increase in arrivals, the figures are just notional. Leisure arrivals have not gone up as most of the hotels are experiencing low occupancy."

"People who are coming to India are mostly non-resident Indians who are here to visit friends and relatives, or Indian origin investors who have been motivated by our prime minister, Narendra Modi, to invest in India."

Echoing a similar sentiment, Ravi Gosain, managing director of Erco Travels, told the *Show Daily*: "The present state of inbound tourism is gloomy. We are facing a severe slow-down that has occurred over the last few years due to multiple factors. India isn't expensive but it just isn't on the minds of holidaymakers. Our neighbours, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Bhutan, are pricier but they are doing good tourism business."

E M Najeeb, managing director of Air-travel Enterprises India, blames the slow-down on softening travel demand in the longhaul markets, which are traditionally drawn to India.

"(Travel movements today are mostly) intra-region and some of India's neighbours have (moved faster than India) to leverage their competitive prices to become popular places for economic vacations," he said.

Some local tour operators believe that the absence of new tourism products is costing the country dearly.

Gosain said: "Our industry has been pleading with the Ministry of Tourism to come up with major reforms (in order to) promote India as a fresh destination. I heard that some concrete promotional activities are in the pipeline but as long as they won't materialise, we can only live in



Taj Mahal

Destination in numbers

137.7%

The year-on-year growth in tourist arrivals on e-tourist visa to India in June 2016, reaching a total of 36,982 people

10.7%

The growth in foreign tourist arrivals in April 2016 over the same period in 2015. Bangladesh makes up the highest share of tourist arrivals that month, followed by the US and the UK

3.1 million

The total number of foreign tourist arrivals from January to April this year, up 10.1 per cent from the same period in 2015

hope. We can't sell the same products for long because travellers' needs are changing and we need to change as well or create new attractions to lure new customers."

Goyal also sees an urgent need for India to create a vision of it being a safe destination, to counter the past media coverage on India's violent crimes against women.

Najeeb agrees, saying: "The negative publicity and tourism advisories imposed on India by various countries turn tourists away from us."

Meanwhile, India's hoteliers have another cause of woe to tackle – a multiple layer of taxation imposed on hotels that is complex and irks customers.

Sanjeev Bhatia, general manager, The Metropolitan Hotel & Spa New Delhi, said: "There is an immediate need to streamline the tax structure in India. The current system on room tariffs has a number of taxes like luxury, service, sales, VAT and more. Furthermore, a new tax can be imposed suddenly, making it even harder for us to explain to our guests who've

VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets do you think will perform best this year?



Debjit Dutta, director & CEO, Impression Tourism Services

I operate in east and north-eastern part of the country which is an upcoming destination for the global

market. However, some tourists are unwilling to travel to this region as it is situated near to a place (in Bangladesh) where there was a terrorist attack recently. However, I expect Asian markets like China, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong to do well since they are (more resistant to) uncertainties as compared to the traditional western markets. I think it is time (to explore) regional markets. They may not be very high paying, but definitely have a lot of potential.

Arun Anand, managing director, Midtown Travels



I expect South-east Asia, China, the US and European markets to fare well this year. And if there are marketing campaigns by the tourism ministry, we can expect a good number of arrivals.

booked in advance, why they now need to pay more."

Bhatia also urged the establishment of world-class safety and cleanliness standards at key tourist places.

Industry players opined that if the above issues were addressed quickly, India's tourism fortunes would turn around for the better.

PRODUCTS

1 Rakkh Resort

This new premium property in the heart of the Kangra district in the state of Himachal Pradesh promises to be a venue for relaxation. Sitting at the top of one of the foothills of the Dhaulandhar mountain range which belongs to the Himalayas, and comprising 17 cottages over more than four acres of land, guests of Rakkh Resort can enjoy serenity and awe-inspiring views of the snow-capped mountains. Yoga classes and tours around the area are offered.

2 Costa Cruises' Costa neoClassica

For the first time, travellers can look forward to embarking at Mumbai and going on a cruise that calls at numerous enchanting Indian destinations such as Goa and Cochin, as well as farther destinations in the region including the Maldives and Colombo. The highly-anticipated *Costa neoClassica* will offer weekly sailings from

December 16, 2016 to March 18, 2017. *Costa neoClassica* has 654 cabins with capacity for 1,700 passengers, a casino, a theatre, a disco, a ballroom and a grand bar. Plenty of entertainment is promised on the high seas.

3 Pride Plaza Hotel Aerocity

Pride Group Hotels has opened its first luxury hotel in the Indian capital. Strategically located in close proximity of Delhi and Gurgaon, the hotel features 385 exquisite rooms and suites, five state-of-the-art banquet halls, eclectic dining venues, an outdoor swimming pool, fitness centre and the ORA spa.

4 Mustard, Goa

This new restaurant in Goa's Sangolda area specialises in European and Indian Bengali cuisine. Menu highlights include chicken scallopini with a pesto mustard dressing, crispy fish with ratatouille, pork

medallions served with a sweet potato mash, as well as old Bengali favourites like *dal puri* and *kumror chhokka* and *bhapa doi*. Mustard can seat 150 guests.

5 Varun Beach Bheemili Resort

AccorHotels has opened this 28-key resort some 25km north-east of Visakhapatnam city. It overlooks the scenic Bay of Bengal and offers guests five acres of pristine shorelines and easy access to Bheemili beach. Facilities include various F&B outlets, a rooftop infinity pool and a spa.

6 Courtyard Bengaluru Outer Ring Road and Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru Outer Ring Road

These two hotels are part of an integrated property complex by Marriott International, providing a total of 292 rooms. Guests staying at both hotels can enjoy facilities across the complex. The hotels are close to Global Tech Park.



Kava Bar, Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru Outer Ring Road (above); Oriental Spice at Pride Plaza Hotel Aerocity



Destination Philippines

Towards new frontiers

Strengthening hardware and developing secondary destinations may provide some relief to the overloaded gateway in Manila. **Rosa Ocampo** reports

Industry players in the Philippines are eager to find out about how the industry would cope with the increase in tourist traffic, just as Wanda Tulfo Teo, a seasoned travel agent plucked by new Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, takes helm at the Department of Tourism (DoT).

Growth in foreign arrivals is certain this year and the next, said Domingo Ramon Enerio III, COO of DoT's marketing arm, Tourism Promotions Board (TPB).

He expects that arrivals would total 5.9 million to 6 million, up from 5.4 million in 2015. Numbers next year are likely to be boosted by the country's hosting of the year-long ASEAN Summit and the Miss

Coron, Busuanga island, Palawan province, Philippines



Sean Heuschler/istock

Universe pageant in January, he said.

This leaves trade players with a nagging question on their minds: Where will these foreign tourists pass – not counting the over 55 million domestic travellers – when the country's major gateway of Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) is heaving from its congested sin-

gle runway and four passenger terminals?

During the tourism stakeholders' meeting with the DoT a few months ago, Rajah Tours president Jose Clemente III said: "Ten million (arrivals) is achievable if we have the capacity in place", echoing the industry's wish for adequate infrastructure.

Tourism undersecretary Benito Bengzon Jr said six airports are either being built or improved in Cagayan de Oro and Davao in Mindanao; Puerto Princesa in Palawan; Bohol and Bacolod in the Visayas. Inroads are also being made in attracting airlines to fly to secondary destinations outside of Manila.

The strategy of developing secondary destinations to relief the strain on NAIA is also evident in efforts to improve market access, infrastructure and connectivity to new destinations, including the tourism enterprise zone planned for San Vicente in Palawan, Bengazon told *TTG Show Daily*.

Travel consultants are also whispering about the dearth of new developed destinations. While Manila, Boracay, Palawan, Cebu and Bohol are among the most popular tourist haunts, tourists are expecting a wider range and variety of developed destinations, they explained.

Further sign of tourism capacity adjusting to growing arrivals, domestic and foreign investments are being poured into hotels, integrated resorts, theme parks and other tourist attractions country-wide.

Destination in numbers

9.9 nights

The average length of stay of tourists in the Philippines

13.5%

The increase in arrivals to over 2.4 million in January-May 2016, from 2.1 million in the same period last year, prompting the DoT to retain the *It's More Fun in the Philippines* campaign

53.4%

The percentage share of Asia to the top 12 biggest inbound markets in the Philippines as of January-May 2016, leading the country to promoting to top Asian markets such as South Korea and Japan

Moreover, according to Bengzon, a DoT and Department of Public Works and Highways partnership is resulting in the construction of "2,947km of roads all over the country leading to tourism sites".

He added the DoT are developing emerging markets such as dive, medical tourism and farm tourism. Cruise market initiatives are also being strengthened.

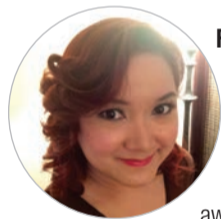
JP Cabalza, managing director of Cencorp Travel, said he and other travel consultants have formed the Asia Premium Travel Mart, now on its second year, to assist the TPB in bringing attracting premium buyers, not just from the usual source countries but also from emerging ones including Israel, Iran, the Baltic and Poland.

"It's an eye opener for hotels, resorts and destinations to improve their products and facilities if they see many buyers and tourists arriving," said Fe Abling-Yu, general manager of Arfel Travel and Tours who is also part of APTM.

Amid such developments to open up new tourism frontiers, some agents in the country anticipate challenges. Felise Cruze, marketing and operations manager at Trips Travel, said: "The problem we face is the difficulty negotiating with smaller properties in provincial areas. For example, sometimes tours are no longer available but we don't get informed of this. We're ready to market smaller destinations, but are (the players there) ready?"

VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets will perform best for you this year and why?



Felise Cruze, marketing and operations manager, Trips Travel

From what I see now, Europe in general is picking up.

An upcoming market is the younger-set backpacking crowd from all over the world.

The Middle East is also growing due to halal tourism – many hotels are starting to cater to them. They are also becoming increasingly aware of the country, with destinations like Palawan getting popular.



Sylvia Tupasi-Gomez, director of sales and marketing, Corporate International Travel and Tours

Our inbound business is getting stronger. We decided to focus more on European markets and are also getting some groups from emerging regions like the Baltic. We receive enquiries from groups in Poland as well.

Inbound from South-east Asian markets like Singapore and Malaysia is growing. In the past they didn't think of coming here. It's interesting that tourists from Malaysia and Indonesia are now visiting although we share the same attractions such as beaches.

PRODUCTS

1 Okada Manila integrated resort

To be launched in November, this 44ha integrated resort will be the third in Manila's Entertainment City. Facilities include three luxe hotels adding a total of 993 keys; an indoor night club and beach club enclosed in a glass dome for up to 4,500 guests, touted to be the biggest in South-

east Asia; more than 50 premier and luxury brands in a massive glass corridor; and 21 restaurants.

2 Discovery Primea Hotel

A member of the Preferred Hotels and Resorts LVX Collection, Discovery Primea has 141 keys, with half of the suites fully-equipped with kitchen and laundry facilities meant for longer staying guests.

Hotel facilities include a chapel, an ambulance on standby and a 20m heated infinity pool overlooking Makati's skyline. Rooms have PressReader – digital access to newspapers and magazines worldwide – high speed internet access for multiple devices, iPod/iPad docks, pillow menu, a Nespresso machine, among others.

3 Coast Boracay

Opening late this year, Coast Boracay, located in station two of Boracay, will fea-



Coast Boracay resort

ture 77 guestrooms, a 19m swimming pool, two functions rooms and four F&B outlets. Several metres from Coast Boracay is its sister property, Blue Marina, which houses 12 bungalows.

4 Halal tourism

Now a byword in the Philippines, halal tourism is getting more adherents as a growing number of tour operators, hotels and restaurants are joining forces to offer

halal food, mosque visits and other Muslim-friendly products.

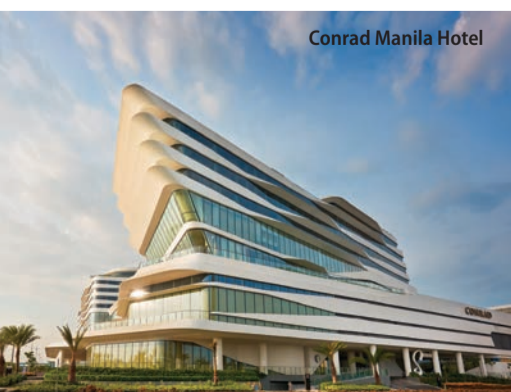
Products to watch out for include a dedicated Muslim Visitor Guide by the Department of Tourism in partnership with Singapore-based CrescentRating and its sister brand HalalTrip.

5 Surfing

Surfing is set to become a major tourism product as the Department of Tourism plans a partnership with an Australian company to certify surf instructors in Baler, Aurora, Zambales, Mati in Davao Oriental and other surf destinations.

Also in the pipeline is a national criteria for certifying, classifying and accrediting resorts, surf camps and training facilities, apart from requiring them to have the essential teaching equipment and gear as well as emergency rescue and crisis response capabilities.

Conrad Manila Hotel



Destination Malaysia

Reaching for top-tier segments



Curtis Crest Treetop Walk in Penang

Photo by Korea Tourism Organization

ware advancements, Kuala Lumpur Tourism Bureau has been conducting hospitality seminars for taxi drivers and trained 80 Tourism Ambassadors in the city this year.

Over in the north, the state of Penang earned a major tourism boost by hosting the inaugural edition of WTM Connect Asia. The event was attended by 70 hosted buyers from 25 countries, including Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, the Czech Republic, Canada, Denmark and Slovakia – markets that have never been on Penang's radar in the past.

Ooi Chok Yan, CEO of Penang Global Tourism, said: "Having a world-class show like this in Penang is good branding for the state. It offered an opportunity for us to tap new markets."

Penang Global Tourism hosted fam tours for buyers and provided four choice of activities to showcase new tourism products.

One of the highlighted attractions is Habitat Penang Hill, a new eco-tourism product located a 10-minute walk from the top station of Penang Hill. The owner and management company, Flagstaff Holdings, invested RM32 million on this four-hectare site to develop attractions that are suitable for both leisure and MICE travellers. Habitat Penang Hill features a guided nature trail, the Curtis Crest Treetop Walk which opened in August and the 230m-long Canopy Walk bridges. And at 40m above the forest floor at its highest point, Habitat Penang Hill lays claims to having the highest viewing platform in Penang, where visitors can even spot the islands of Langkawi on a clear day.

This month Habitat Penang Hill will unveil the Canopy Discovery Tour, an area for teambuilding activities. A variety of high and low ropes as well as tree climbing activities will be available at opening, while South-east Asia's longest dual zip-

Destination in numbers

30.5 million

The number of foreign arrivals targeted for 2016, up from 25.7 million arrivals in 2015

RM103 billion

The amount of tourist receipts (US\$25.8 billion) Malaysia aims to achieve in 2016, up from RM69.5 billion contributed in 2015

199,725

The number of cruise passengers that sailed into Malaysia in 1Q2016, a 32.7 per cent increase from 150,473 during the same period last year

New tourism hardware in Kuala Lumpur and Penang are helping Malaysia to attract bigger spenders and grow its tourist receipts. **S Puvaneswary** reports

New infrastructure developments and attractions in Malaysia are helping the country to attract more high-yield and middle-income tourists, which is in line with the government's vision that tourism should contribute RM168 million (US\$41.2 million) in receipts by 2020.

In the capital city, Kuala Lumpur Tourism Bureau aims to make the city an attractive option for the luxury segment, as the city has supporting infrastructure to cater to demand.

New luxury hotels, such as The St Regis

Kuala Lumpur which opened in May, and several other international brands that are coming online within the next two years, such as W in 2017 and Four Seasons in 2018, will help make the destination more attractive to well-heeled travellers.

The city's grand dame of opulent accommodation – the 19-year-old Ritz Carlton Hotel, Kuala Lumpur – has also stepped up its game by undergoing its first refurbishment this year. The result is a brighter, fresher and more modern property.

To ensure software is on par with hard-

line over a rainforest will debut in 2017. The latter, known as Big Zip, will span 800m in two directions.

Business event delegates in Penang are seen as a high-yield market, as they spend an average four times more than leisure tourists. To attract more business event delegates, the state government has established a state funded bureau early this year. Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau is headed by Ashwin Gunasekaran as its CEO.

In 1Q2017, the state will have its first purpose-built convention venue. The Subterranean Penang International Convention and Exhibition Centre will be able to serve large gatherings of up to 8,000 people. Its massive ballroom on the subterranean floor is suitable for large events, such as company dinners, meetings, conventions and exhibitions.

PRODUCTS

1 Penang Amazing World Studios

As the world's first Warner Brothers licensed gallery, this attraction houses more than 30 trick arts, featuring mainly Warner Brothers cartoon characters against a Penang backdrop. Visitors to the highly interactive studio have endless fun taking amazing trick photography. Particularly fun is the virtual reality section where visitors can don a headset and glasses, and be transported on a roller coaster for an Indiana Jones type adventure.

2 The Ghostbusters Adventure Live

Sunway Lagoon's Lynton V Harris Scream Park unveiled a new interactive attraction,

The Ghostbusters Adventure Live, in July. The attraction, said to be Asia's first Ghostbusters attraction, is based on the movie franchise and its famous characters. It occupies the top level of Scream Park and takes visitors through a harrowing 20-minute journey that visits locations based on the relaunch of the movie.

3 Sayang Sarawak

Since early 2016, Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCKK) has been operating the *Sayang Sarawak* catamaran which can be chartered for private functions. Packages and catering services can be

customised to meet the requirements of clients. Organisers hiring the catamaran have a choice of two routes, from Kuching Waterfront to BCKK and from the Isthmus jetty up to the mouth of the Sarawak River. *Sayang Sarawak* will take passengers past quaint villages, verdant jungles and wetlands along the Sarawak River.

4 Visit Kedah Year

This year has been designated as Visit Kedah year and to draw visitors to the mainland, the state is banking on archeo-tourism. Visit Kedah campaign theme, *Where it all began*, capitalises on Bujang Valley where relics uncovered at the Sungai Batu Civilisation Complex there were found to date back to 535 BC. Tourism Kedah has trained 20 guides to provide interpretation services for tourists to the archeological sites at Bujang Valley while local tour operators sell packaged tours to the historical sites.

5 TOKB Café

Located in Section 13, Petaling Jaya, the new cafe serves authentic Kelantanese cuisine in a military theme environment that celebrates the owners' love for wartime memorabilia. TOKB – an abbreviation of Taste of Kota Bharu, the state capital of Kelantan – can seat 100 diners.

VIEWPOINTS

Which source markets will perform best for you this year and why?



Uzaidi Udanis, general manager, Eyes Holidays

We are getting good numbers of MICE business from MNCs based in Singapore.

We think this is due to the exchange rate and the close proximity which makes it easy to organise a short trip. For leisure business, Indochina is doing well because of the availability of direct flights.

Adam Kamal, CEO, Olympik Holidays

We think the stigma against Muslims in the US and Europe will cause a shift of Middle Eastern travellers to South-east Asia, and Malaysia will benefit from it. The exchange rate is favourable and many Middle Eastern airlines offer promotional rates to Malaysia from time to time, which encourages Middle Eastern agents to promote Malaysia.



TOKB Café



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News



Recovery gains ground

While regional visitors help to prop up Nepal's tourism, a new campaign could lend more muscle to the recovering destination

By S Puvaneswary

Nepal's tourism is making good recovery progress more than a year after the devastating earthquake in April 2015, with 1H2016 seeing a 15 per cent increase in arrivals over the corresponding period in 2015.

Subodh Thapa, a representative of Chitwan National Park, described 2015 as a "rough year" and said gaps left by the international market after the earthquake were filled by domestic tourism.

However, this year, the national park has seen recovery in Nepal's regional markets of India and China. He expects that demand from Europe would also pick up later this year.

"There is no fear among tourists (to visit Nepal). We have seen a lot of FITs," he said.

Likewise, Sanjay Mathema, president at Kathmandu-based Travel World Experiences, is optimistic about the destination's recovery, having seen encouraging signs from the incentive market, especially the automobile, electronics, medical and insurance sectors.

He anticipates even better results in the months to come. "All our tour operators have put Nepal back in their brochures since early this year in preparation for the peak travel season (from October to March)."

Moreover, hotel brands including Hilton and Four Seasons opening in Nepal next year reflect investor confidence in the destination, noted Shradha Shrestha, senior officer, brand promotion and corporate marketing at Ne-

pal Tourism Board (NTB).

Potentially helping Nepal get back on its feet is the upcoming *Visit Nepal Year 2018* campaign, the first major push for international tourism and part of a 10-year National Tourism Strategic Action Plan.

The campaign will be a collaborative effort between public and private sectors to drive international arrivals past the one million mark, 400,000 more than this year's target.

Deepak Raj Joshi, CEO of NTB, said the campaign will highlight Nepal's different facets such as culture and festivals to break the perception that it is an extreme adventure destination, in hopes of attracting the family segment.

Depak added that the government is also looking at integrating trekking and mountaineering permits in a single system.



Deepak: more reasons to return

Expo power

Kazakhstan's Expo 2017: Energy of the Future international exhibition is set to be a game-changing event that will "open the gates of tourism", said Assel Nurkebayeva, president of the association of tourist agencies of Kazakhstan.

Taking place from June to September next year, the exhibition is expected to welcome over five million visitors from over 100 countries, marking the first international event of such scale for the Central Asian nation.

Nurkebayeva said: "Not many people know where Kazakhstan is but we are expecting that to change with Expo 2017 and tourism will take off."

According to her, a majority of tourists currently hail from Russia, China, Iran and India, with business visitors comprising 80 per cent of the inbound pie.

As such, she emphasised that there is a "huge potential" to attract leisure tourists from other Asian countries like Malaysia.

The devaluation of the Kazakhstani tenge on the back of falling global oil prices and Russia's economic crisis has upped the destination appeal.

"(Kazakhstan) is now an affordable destination with accommodation and tourism products at almost 50 per cent cheaper," she said. – Paige Lee Pei Qi

Taiwan looks south

By Paige Lee Pei Qi

Taiwan has rolled out the New Southbound Policy to boast arrivals from South-east Asia, and shift the epicentre of its visitor source markets away from China.

This three-pronged approach, which was first announced in June, aims to reduce tourism visa barriers for ASEAN countries, including extending visa-free privileges to more countries; expanding a Tourism Bureau programme that simplifies visa processes for South-east Asian tour groups; and extending online visa approvals to more countries.

Speaking to the *Daily*, Taiwan Tourism Bureau's (Hong Kong) director, Tony Wu, said: "In the past, the lengthy visa procedure made (the destination) unattractive. This (visa relaxation) has greatly eased the convenience for travellers – definitely a consideration for their holiday planning."

The new South-east Asia-oriented policy has since allowed selected passport holders from Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to apply online for an ROC Travel Authorization Certificate, allowing them to stay in Taiwan for up to 30 days plus multiple re-entries over a 90-day period.

Since August 1, 2016, citizens of Thailand and Brunei have been granted visa-free access to Taiwan, which is already in place for Malaysia and Singapore.

According to Wu, Indonesia and Thailand are key markets the Taiwanese NTO is targeting. The

bureau will invest more in advertisements, TV programmes and media fairs to increase Taiwan's brand recognition.

Welcoming the move, Alex Chang, general manager of FES Tour and Travel Service Taiwan, said: "It is definitely an indication that Taiwan is not just concentrating on a single market like China, but keen to attract tourists from ASEAN countries as well."

President of Edison Travel Service, Peter Kuo, thinks that Taiwan's relatively fresh appeal to ASEAN travellers will bring in at least a 10 per cent increase in visitor traffic from South-east Asia.

He is worried about a potential price war however. "I'm concerned that I'll have to reduce prices with more tour operators coming in to fight for business."

Apart from easing visa regulations, FES Tour and Travel Service's Chang opined that more could be done to improve Taiwan's readiness in welcoming Muslim travellers from South-east Asia.

Chang said: "We can introduce more Muslim-friendly hotels and restaurants because this will show them that we are sensitive to their needs."

CEO of Jakarta-based INA Communications International, Ina Sosrodihardjo, who has not returned to Taiwan since the 1990s, applauds the initiatives the destination is taking.

She said: "We are open to visit new countries if they are ready to welcome us."



Wu: Indonesia, Thailand on the radar

PATA'S FUN FACTS AND TRIVIA

- The PATA annual conference was held in Bali 25 years ago under the chairmanship of Soesilo Soedarman, who served as Indonesia's minister for tourism from 1988-93.
- PATA was founded in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1951
- The people of Chuuk gave PATA an island in Micronesia in 1993
- This is the fifth PATA Travel Mart to be staged in Indonesia. Previous marts were held in Jakarta (1991) and Bali (1985, 1989 and 2007)
- This year's mart has attracted 683 sellers from 272 organisations and 258 buyers from 52 markets



Luxe in the wild

Wildlife enthusiasts should keep their eyes peeled for tigers at the luxury Kanha Village Eco Resort, a 12-key property situated in the buffer region of the Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh, India.

Lodge owner Navneet Maheshwari said the eco-friendly property provides guests with an authentic mudhouse experience in the jungles, with access to modern facilities and luxury accommodation.

Apart from wildlife safari tours, Maheshwari said the lodge has introduced tribal village visits and dances earlier this year to immerse guests in the local culture.

He said: "We immerse guests in very natural surroundings and work with responsible wildlife partners to give a unique experience that you cannot get elsewhere."

While most of the lodge's guests come from the European markets, Maheshwari is observing rising interest from Asian countries, especially from the luxury segment. – Paige Lee Pei Qi

Left: Indonesia Ministry of Tourism deputy minister for overseas promotion I Gde Pitana, PATA chairman Andrew Jones, Indonesian tourism minister Arief Yahya and PATA CEO wrote their congratulatory messages to commemorate the association's 65th founding anniversary

Snapshots

Throbbing with action By Caleb Richard Lai



GRIT Communications International South Korea's Dody Prianto and Daisy Park, and ES Tour South Korea's JongWon Choi



Pacto Indonesia's Umberto Cadamuro and Ade Rachmadi



The Africa Group World Travellers US' Tom Boyd and Beryl Dorsett



McLachlan Experiences Australia's Bianca Signorelli, NostalAsie France's Christelle Unfer and Sequoia MICE & Travel US' Marc Lee



Kurnia Djaja Wisata Tours & Travel Indonesia's Simon Budi and Jodoh Ananda Wisata Tours & Travel Indonesia's Neneng



Focus Asia Travel Thailand's Benoit Metivet and Josep Soler



Yung Ching Travel Service Taiwan's Lily, Ananan Tourist Taiwan's Louisa Tsou and Yung Ching Travel Service Taiwan's Tracy Su



Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT) Indonesia's M Rizky, Philippine DoT's Zenaida Romasanta and Shroff Travel Philippines' Arjun Shroff



Olonade Travel Thailand's Praew, Amy and Hana



Special Holiday Travel India's Sandeep Jain, and Madhya Pradesh Tourism's Vivek Mathur and Rakesh Kumar Goliya



Varsavolo Poland's Ewa Bujek, Atlas Travel International Services Poland's Elizabeth Filipiak, Anju Travels-Resebyrå Sweden's B Kummur Moody, Gloria UUA Event Management Ukraine's Natalia Pigulevskaya and Ramoudt Sevastopol Tour Ukraine's Larysa Buriachkovska

Guidepost Tours Australia's Bob Daniel



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