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Getting ahead in Middle East

Indonesia, Philippines enter the fray

By Mimi Hudoyo

DUBAI Indonesia and the Philippines are playing catch-up with the Middle East, a market which has long been seriously courted by the other mature South-east Asian destinations, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore.

Not only is Indonesia's Ministry of Culture and Tourism appointing a new Visit Indonesia Tourism Officer (VITO), it is partnering Riyadh-based wholesaler Unique Choice to launch a dedicated Indonesia brochure in Arabic and English.

The initial production is for 300,000 copies, to be ready in time for Unique's week-long retail agent workshops in the Middle East beginning May 27 in cities such as Jeddah, Riyadh, Doha and Abu Dhabi.

Unique has a track record of success in featuring South-east Asian destinations, according to CEO Zawfir Ziard.

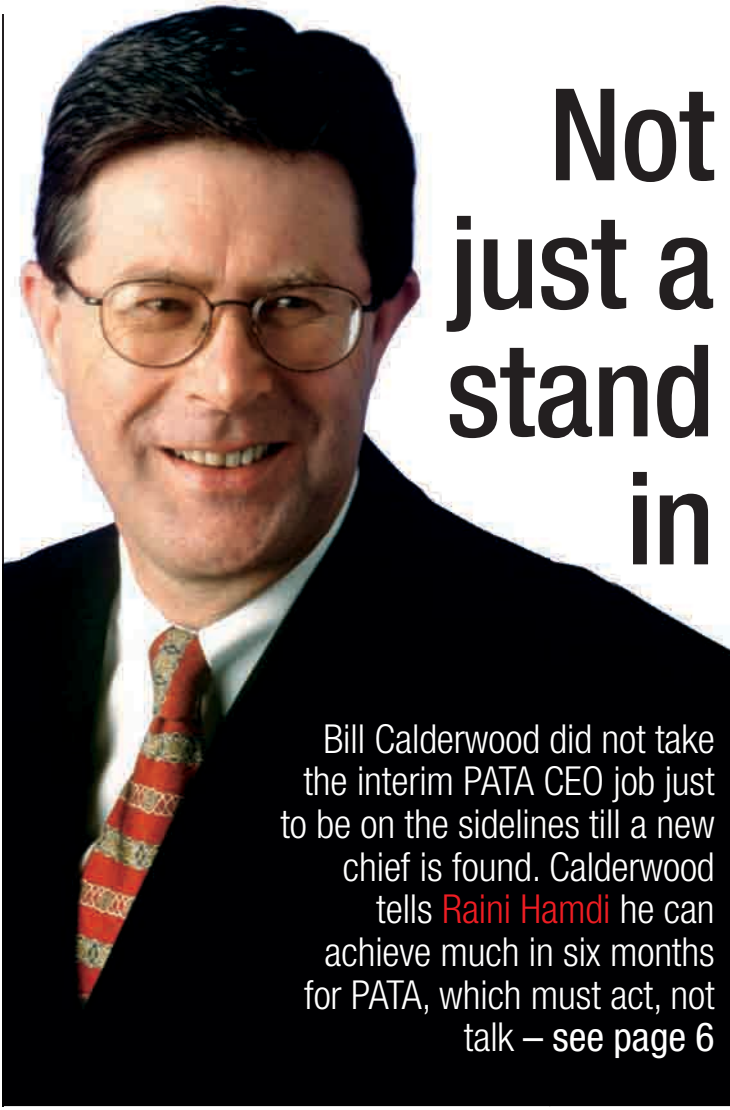
"This is part of our expansion

in South-east Asia, having been successful in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. We always partner the (tourism) authority in developing the market," he said, adding the Philippines is next on its expansion radar.

The Philippines, too, has just appointed tourism marketing and consultancy firm BizGate Dubai to promote the destination to the Gulf countries (TTG Asia e-Daily, May 3). Philippine Department of Tourism (DoT)'s presence at the Arabian Travel Market has also grown bigger each year in the last four years.

Indonesia, on the other hand, is replacing its current VITO, whose contract has ended, with a new VITO who "speaks the language, knows the market and has strong relations with the local industry", said Indonesia's director-general of tourism marketing Sapta Nirwandar.

Continued on page 2



Not just a stand in

Bill Calderwood did not take the interim PATA CEO job just to be on the sidelines till a new chief is found. Calderwood tells Raini Hamdi he can achieve much in six months for PATA, which must act, not talk – see page 6

TTG Asia e-Daily

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Watch out, Asia may soon trip

Time to rethink hotel investments in the region as growth slowdown is imminent: economist

By Gracia Chiang

SINGAPORE The remarkable performance that Asia has been known for is predicted to see a drop-off when US government aid ends and the growing Chinese bubble bursts, but not all investors are convinced.

Speaking at HICAP (Hotel Investment Conference Asia Pacific) UPDATE last week, Blackhorse Asset Management chief economist Richard Duncan said: "Asia has been enjoying extraordinary economic growth for decades and most people expect this trend to persist for decades to come... I'm afraid I think that view is mistaken."

He explained that as the American government comes under pressure to reduce its budget deficit and the Federal Reserve's "pa-

per money creation" is scheduled to end in June, the US economy is likely to weaken in the second half of 2011.

He also believed as much as 40 per cent of China's economy was dependent on its trade surplus with the US.

Said Duncan: "The US trade deficit is not going to keep fueling the global economy the way it has in the past. Asia's era of export-led growth is over. This trade deficit is going to, at best, flatten out and possibly correct more than it already has."

The Chinese government had allowed a phenomenal loan growth of 60 per cent in two years, a "sure-fire recipe for disaster", said Duncan, explaining that these bank loans were not going to be repaid in the long run, thus

triggering a government bailout.

India, on the other hand, was not seeing wages going up fast enough to allow locals to pay the

interest on their rapidly inflating property prices, he added.

However, other industry watchers were more optimistic.

Viewpoint How will China fare?



"If you're making plans about how to invest in China and Asia, you'd better prepare for this change. China is not going to have 10 per cent GDP growth for the next 10 years. It's going to slow very radically."

Richard Duncan
Chief economist
Blackhorse Asset Management



"There is no doubt we have a supply issue and that has manifested itself in relatively low rates, but from a demand perspective, the China market is going to continue to grow."

Michael Issenberg
Chairman and COO
Accor Asia Pacific

Accor Asia Pacific chairman and COO, Michael Issenberg, said while China's GDP growth had been hovering between eight and 10 per cent for some time, its travel industry had been expanding at an even faster rate.

VinaCapital, CEO, Don Lam, likewise felt that Chinese demand would continue to be strong. "Mainland Chinese will continue to be the largest source of arrivals in Vietnam, and there will be more in the future especially to the central Vietnam coast."

"With fewer travellers from the US and elsewhere, I think the pick-up will be from North Asia because of Vietnam's proximity to southern China. We constantly have increased arrivals from China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan."

Looking beyond China deals

By Gracia Chiang

SINGAPORE A fear of supply saturation in the Chinese market as well as opportunities from distressed assets in Europe, US and even Japan are among factors that are driving investors to concentrate their efforts elsewhere.

A report presented at HICAP (Hotel Investment Conference Asia Pacific) UPDATE showed that of about 350,000 rooms coming into Asia-Pacific over the next three to five years, more than half are being built in China.

Said STR Global area director for Asia, Jonas Ogren: "China will see some 16 per cent increase in its supply over the next three to five years and while this might look okay or people may say that we can handle and absorb this, what's interesting is that this supply increase is not evenly distributed over all of China."

Peter Meyer, managing direc-

tor, Pacifica Partners, said he was backing away from China for the time being.

"Land prices have moved the wrong direction and yields have moved the opposite direction. We haven't been able to make it work."

He pointed out that other markets like Australia, for example, had similar opportunities but without the difficulties of execution in China and India.

"You've got transparency and you've got much more vibrant secondary markets," he said.

Also looking at Australia was LaSalle Investment Management international director Andrew Heithersay, who said the market had "less competition for interesting hotel deals".

He added that while deals in China could take 10 months to conclude, two months were all that's needed in Australia,

Singapore and Hong Kong.

Japan, on the other hand, is attractive because of "distressed opportunities", he observed.

Kosmopolito Hotels International president and executive director Bill Mok agreed that he wouldn't have "looked at Japan six months ago".

Casting the net wider, Regent Hotels & Resorts chairman Steven Pan said good buys could also be had in Europe and the US due to the "distressed situation", with luxury properties on offer in the latter.

"The Chinese market is terribly oversupplied, so there will be opportunities in three to four years for acquiring distressed assets," he said.

Said Meyer: "Over time, there will probably be some sort of correction (in China), and that would probably be the time where we will step back in."

Continued from page 1

New breed from Middle East

The Indonesian and the Philippines' trade welcome their respective NTO initiatives to increase presence in the Middle East.

Indonesia's Indo Journey business development director, Anthon Johannes, said: "There has been a growing interest in the Far East in the last few years (among Middle East travellers). While Malaysia and Thailand are the major destinations, travellers have started to look at other destinations."

Johannes also sees a younger generation of travellers who have studied overseas and are more open to international cultures. "Travellers from Saudi Arabia used to avoid Bali because of its non-halal food and the way international tourists dress. Now, we see a growing demand for the destination," he said.

Blue Horizons Travel and

Tours Philippines' president Alexander Stutely does not only see a growing number of travellers but also an expansion of market segments.

"The market grew 100 per cent for us last year. Although this is from a low base, it shows how the interest is growing fast," he said. "The traffic from the Middle East used to be the corporate market travelling to cities. Now we are seeing a growing leisure market to resort destinations."

Shroff International Travel Care Philippines' managing director Arjun Shroff said: "The DoT has taken the right approach to appoint Bizgate as its marketing representative here. Its director, Mohamad Ibrahim Masri, has represented some of the other Asian destinations, so he knows what is expected of him and he knows the market well."

East West Siam changes gears

To adopt Asialink brand outside Thailand

By Sirima Eamtako

BANGKOK East West Siam has adjusted its marketing strategy, following its partnership with Asialink Holidays.

Chananya Phataraprasit, director of East West Siam, said that East West Siam would remain the brand for all operations and contracting in Thailand. On the other hand, marketing activities outside the country, with a continued focus on the European, Australian and US markets, would carry the Asialink Holidays brand because it is more recognisable and has a wider marketing network.

Asialink, which acquired shares in East West Siam, has also taken over the Thai tour operator's management on April 1 (*TTG Asia e-Daily*, March 28, 2011).

Another key change under Asialink is the employment of full-time tour guides to ensure that the partnership's Thai operations offer the same standard of

service as Asialink's operations in Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, according to Asialink general manager Thailand, Sandor Leinwand recte Rein.

The company is in the process of recruiting and training up to 12 full-time guides who meet tour service standards and speak foreign languages to join the staff of 12 in Bangkok within "a matter of months", Leinwand recte Rein said.

He added that the short-term goal was to continue existing operations and products of East West Siam, while the long-term goal was to implement the philosophy of Asialink Holidays, which has been in business for more than 15 years.

When asked what the business expectation was in the first year of operations under Asialink's management, Chananya said the focus was not about positioning the company in terms of number of customers, "but to run a profitable inbound operation".

New Malacca tax seen as burden

By Ellen Chen

KUALA LUMPUR Malacca's travel trade is counting the cost of an additional five per cent heritage tax on hotel guests that will start from September 1.

This is on top of the existing 16 per cent tax – six per cent government tax and 10 per cent service charge – that is currently being levied.

"The heritage tax is unreasonable and impacts everyone, from hoteliers and operators to tourists," said Stadhuys Tours and Travel managing director William Chan.

The tax would affect an es-

timated 193 hotels and resorts at the UNESCO World Heritage city. Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said the money would go to the maintenance and conservation of heritage sites. About RM12 million (US\$4 million) is expected to be collected annually.

"We support heritage conservation, but there are better ways to seek funding than by taxing tourists," said Andy Soo, Mayflower Acme Tours deputy general manager and inbound division head, who argued that already only a small percentage of visitors are overnights.

"An extra 21 per cent tax on hotel bills is heavy and would impact MICE groups," said Tan Hui Teng, chairman of the Malaysian Association of Hotels Malacca chapter, which represents 28 hotels. "We are already struggling under trying times."

He pointed out that local hotels recorded an average of 59 per cent occupancy last year, although their rates were lower than Kuala Lumpur's.

Tan added that the association and the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents had submitted a memorandum to the state government.



TTG's country editors

TTG Asia Media is delighted to name two of its senior editorial team members country editors. Sirima Eamtako is editor – Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, and Mimi Hudoyo is editor – Indonesia. Their new titles better reflect their responsibility, seniority and vast experience. Both have earned the respect of their industry members and peers, and are instrumental in keeping the TTG brand name strong and credible through the years.



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Tourism Data



China set to become the third most-visited destination worldwide; international arrivals to Asia-Pacific continue to rise; and the impact of recent events in Japan, the Middle East and North Africa on air travel.

Adam Tan



Join our mystery man as he examines in minute detail Virgin Airlines' owner Sir Richard Branson and AirAsia CEO Tony Fernandes' attempts to raise funds for charity through auctioning off the chance to give Branson a "close shave".

Hot Deals

Exotissimo is inviting agents to sign up for its annual South-east Asia fam trips; Preferred Hotel Group is offering agents 15 per cent commission; and Le Meridien Khao Lak has a travel industry special.



Hot Moves

Ernst Mayer is appointed general manager of the recently-opened Jumeirah Dhevanafushi in the Maldives and Ian McDonald Cameron is now general manager of Centara Grand Beach Resort & Spa Boracay, Philippines.

What agents want

AGENTS across the region are responding enthusiastically to the announcement of a TTG Travel Agents Conference (TTG Asia e-Daily, April 28, 2011) at ITB Asia this October, showing a huge gap exists for such an event.

Many have come forward with their wishlist of topics for the conference to address. Based on this first crop of suggestions, the event's sole aim as a practical How To – to ensure that travel agents will walk away with tangible learning points which they can apply to their business – is on the right track.

The topics voiced to date are not out of this world (well, except for one avid agent, a certified fire walker instructor, who wants to motivate agent attendees at the conference with fire-walking). Agents want to listen to experts on greater customisation of travel, market segmentation and technology, among others, and from successful agents and tour operators.

But what they want are "not the usual blah-blah assumptions" but real insights on, "How do they do it?". They want a con-

ference which can cover "modern topics" such as technology with "a back-to-basics" approach, as Laurent Kuenzle, group managing director of Asian Trails, said.

Said Raini Hamdi, group editor, Travel Group, TTG Asia Media: "It is no longer about debates and more debates on

But what they want are "not the usual blah-blah assumptions" but real insights on, "How do they (the experts) do it?"

whether travel agents will live or die. We're done with that. There is room for travel agents worldwide. The question is, who are the new agents? Why are they standing tall? How did they do it? What can I learn from them?

What lessons can I take from those outside the industry who are successful and whose models I can apply to my business?"

TTG Travel Agents Conference, with ITB Asia as partner, is a non-profit event and is open free to ITB Asia delegates and to TTG Asia readers. This year's conference will be half a day.

Currently, Asia does not have a regional travel agents conference. "TTG Asia Media hopes to fill this gap," said Darren Ng, managing director, TTG Asia Media. "We have been with the industry for more than 35 years and launching this conference is again a reflection of our commitment to the trade."

ITB Asia executive director, Nino Gruettke, said: "We are pleased to be partnering TTG Asia Media to launch the region's first, dedicated travel agent conference. This event will further seal ITB Asia as the platform for travel exchange and strengthen its education component."

Continue to help shape your conference. Vote today on www.ttgasia.com which features a poll on the first four possible topics.

Obituary

A first-class tour operator at heart and a gentleman to boot

THE regional industry lost one of its most respected professionals, Hans Haensel, who died on May 2 in Dubai after a long battle with cancer.

Haensel served the Emirates Group for many years and was its senior vice president, destination & leisure management division.

He was a first-class tour operator at heart, and a gentleman who exuded charm, kindness and humility. The media loved him, as he always answered questions candidly and was not afraid of telling the truth.

Haensel, in one interview, said when he was a child, he wanted to be a postman because he liked the children's TV programme, *Postman Pat*. He ended up every bit the postman of the industry, a master at delivering goodwill, and the goods.



"Hans Haensel was not only a stalwart in travel and tourism, he was an exceptionally humane and compassionate friend and colleague," said Emirates Holidays' senior vice president, Fred-eric Bardin.

"Always supportive of his staff, Hans recognised and encouraged them as well as

helped them forge their careers. Hans' generosity also extended to friends, acquaintances or employees he found to be in difficulty, financially or otherwise.

"Hans' pioneering spirit and keen foresight towards the development of tourism in Dubai is the rich legacy he leaves behind." – Raini Hamdi

Most commented on www.ttgasia.com

Tax ruffles feathers

OUR story on the Malacca state government's intention to impose a five per cent heritage fee on hotel guests from September 1 has raised a number of questions among our readers.

Australia's Globetrotting Gourmet wondered whether the tax would be channelled into a designated heritage fund or general revenues, while Malaysia's Jane Rai was unsure about whom would have to fork out the fee. "I feel imposing such a fee is unnecessary and a deliberate attempt by the authorities to add burden to the consumers," she said.

R&C diversification

RELAIS & CHATEAUX's (R&C) plans to go into tour operating has put Chiang Mai-based Armin Schoch on guard. "Other tour operators will be wary of using R&C hotels, for fear that R&C will give its own tour operating arm competitive advantage over other operators through preferential rates and tools. Confidential handling of other operators' client data will also be an area of concern."

Letter

Your TTG Asia March 25-31 is in hand. Kindly accept my heartiest compliments for an excellent selection of a cross-section of news coverage on all travel-related subjects. I especially found "Spas, The art of wellness" and the first-person account "No boundaries" very informative. They provide guidance for travel agents to sell this specialised and upmarket travel concept. Similarly, "Euphoria over eforea" is also informative and interesting.

Needless to say that your articles on Japan, Myanmar, Bali and Thailand are interesting and provide in-depth information. Similarly, the survey of ASEAN Airlines with details of their performance, network and expansion provide an insight into our regional airlines' networks and activities.

Om Prakash, ex-chairman, Travel Agents Association of India & director, InOrbit Tours, India



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BPA TTG Asia is published by TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd. It is mailed free on written request to readers who meet predetermined criteria. Paid subscriptions are available to those who do not meet the criteria. Annual airmail subscriptions are US\$180 to Asia and US\$199 elsewhere. Cover price US\$5. MICA (P) 039/09/2010 PPS 619/02/2012(022706)

Printed by Times Printers Pte Ltd
16 Tuas Avenue 5, Singapore 639340

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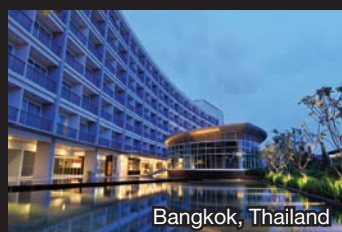
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VIEW FROM THE TOP

Bill Calderwood
Interim CEO
PATA

He did not take the job just to be on the sidelines till a new PATA CEO is found. Calderwood tells **Raini Hamdi** he can achieve much in six months for PATA, which must act more than talk

Not just a stand-in

So you've unveiled a Future Strategic Plan document for PATA (TTG Asia e-Daily, April 12). Your members say it's ambitious, there is a need to prioritise, the proof is in the execution, and you're gone in six months. What can you achieve in six months?

Quite a lot. Of course (the Future Strategic Plan) is ambitious. But it is a vision, not an action plan. It is a defined set of principles, against which we will make some decisions and implement some programmes. From this will flow an action plan, which will be far more specific in terms of priorities, targets and programmes.

How did the Future Strategic Plan come about?

We've had a lot of discussions (on PATA's future). I joined the PATA executive board in July last year, and in a meeting in September, we agreed we needed to move from talk and report to action and implementation. So I chaired a sub-committee, comprising Richard Beere, Anthony Wong and Greg Duffell, to put a marker on the sand and say, this is where we are going from now.

What are the priorities?

One, working with the chapter networks.

Two, communicating in a more effective way about the core focus of the organisation and its competitive advantage to members and prospective members.

Three, giving members not only an understanding of why we're relevant, but providing an organisational structure for us to do that. We're hiring a director of marketing and membership and a regional director Asia, who will have a clear and defined responsibility to work with the membership, particularly in the fastest-growing area of the world.

Are you changing the structure of the organisation?

I'm putting a pillar in. The pillar that is missing is membership and marketing. In simple terms, we've got events, R&D, finance, but the central core is missing, and for a membership organisation, that's such an

obvious gap to be plugged quickly if we want to deliver better services and communicate better with members.

And why do you need a regional director Asia?

To link and communicate to members what PATA can do and vice versa. It's like the role of a country manager: to make sure the organisation is serving its members well.

And I've said, it's no longer one size fits all – there are 755 companies in the PATA umbrella and they run an x number of different businesses and have hundreds of employees across different sectors.

Each has different needs and is in a different phase of development. Each wants us to engage it in different ways and wants to access different levels of programmes. We need to better understand that and tailor-make our programmes sometimes. We need a management structure that recognises that and can respond to that.

There also has to be a cultural change in the way we think of

membership. It is not so much the number of members, but the reach a member gives us. Three of the 755 organisations – Accor, Starwood and Marriott – combined have 9,000 hotels and 436,000 employees. With social media and digital communication, think how more effective we need to be in reaching that sort of group of people than just the pinnacle of one organisation.

It gives us a different mindset of how we use these opportunities to communicate better with members and the broader industry, to better connect with chapters and share ideas, etc.

What are the other priorities?

Finding ways in which we provide not just raw data, but insights, to help people understand why an information is relevant, how it impacts their business and how they should respond.

This is why we are accelerating the development of our interactive software, TIGA (Travel Intelligence Graphic Architecture), which allows us to gather information from a lot of sources,

but add value by showing what it all means.

The other area is the whole issue of advocacy, looking at the wider policies that impact our industry's ability to grow, developing key position papers for these issues and working with other international tourism bodies to ramp up and be heard in a consistent and effective way.

And the last important area is the whole issue of rapid response to disasters (TTG Asia e-Daily, April 11). I've seen it consistently in the last four months, the number of destinations in our region being hit by disasters, and the blanket cover of the media making these destinations a tourist turn-off. So, not only do the community and the industry get impacted by the immediate disaster, they get this long tail of lingering perception damage that is hard to change.

So when are you coming up with an action plan?

After this (PATA Anniversary & Conference last month in Beijing, where this interview was held). We will have an 18-month



business plan and though the actions will take us through to December 2012, the basic principles will go beyond that. I don't want to see a flip-flop in focus, that's why we've gone through this trouble (of doing the Future Strategic Plan).

Won't a new CEO want to stamp his mark? Will all this hold water?

Sure, a new CEO would want to stamp his mark, and when Bill packs up and lies on the beach, the new person will come in with ideas on how to go about improving PATA. But the basic principles by which the organisation is driven won't change. Perhaps, how you go about it will change, but principles such as recognising that chapters are important, or digital communication is important, or the need to engage young people is important – those won't change.

The organisation has gone through a long process, and what I have distilled here is not anything revolutionary. These are basic principles we've adhered to, but we've drifted away a bit, so what I'm saying is, let's get back to it.

Back to your 18-month action plan. What will be the key deliverables?

One is a target of 50 chapters by December 2012 (the number of chapters have dwindled to 38). We've also identified a membership revenue growth of 13 per cent, and it's not about number of members but dollars.

Put another way, when you leave in six months, what would you have achieved?

Established a clear culture in the organisation, one that focuses on delivering things which build business; creating a structure that connects with chapters; and communicating effectively what the organisation does.

What's the worst thing PATA members can do now? What sort of support do you need to get on with it?

There has been a lot of discussion about PATA in recent years, concerns and criticisms voiced, some of them valid. But there has always been the recognition that PATA had provided great value in the past and can deliver value in the future – we just have to have a clear vision and plan of action.

The management team needs support from members, not just in words, but deeds. Increasingly, we will be using more task forces and advisory groups, so you can expect to be tapped to work.

Wasn't volunteerism a pillar of PATA's success in the past?

Indeed. But as with any organisation, when you get bigger, sometimes it is difficult to harness that spirit. There is no less intent from members to volunteer. The problem is, it got to a size that made it difficult for people to link and interact. We'll get back to that. There's so much resource and skill set across the membership which we can use. The PATA HQ is just a facilitator.

From feedback, though, it seems the work is just insurmountable. On every count, from brand to budget to finance to leadership to premier partners, PATA is said to have let its members down.

It is not insurmountable. I am not a masochist. You can only address things which you see in front of you and get on with it. I've said to people, I will not dwell on the past because I cannot control the past. I can learn from it, but I'm looking at the current and the future. That's where I can make an impact.

If people want to dwell on the past, my advice to them is, move on. I've no time or patience for that. This organisation has potential. It has to change, yes, and I have been blunt about the need for change and been very open about the issues I've identified. And as of now, we've identified the problems, drawn a line on the sand and are moving on from here, with clear policies and procedures.

The challenges of an industry association is not unique to PATA. Around the world, associations evolve and members

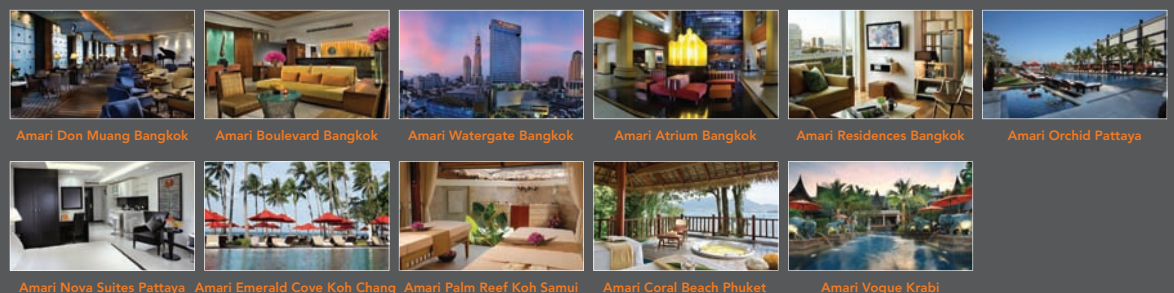
evolve, thus needs evolve. Every organisation has to keep working out where its potential lies to add real value is and deliver on that value.

So why are you just an interim CEO if you believe so much in PATA? And how is the search for the new CEO going?

I am not in a position to put my hand up for the full-time role. I've made it clear from the beginning I could only take on an interim role. Otherwise, it would impact on my ability to deliver

other things which I've set my mind to.

As for the search for the new CEO, I've had extensive meetings with headhunters and will recommend one to the board. When I joined (in March), I did say my immediate priorities were to start the process of identifying the CEO; to deliver a conference which would make a statement about the PATA brand – and I think we can tick that – and work with team, board and members to define the future strategic focus and develop a business plan.



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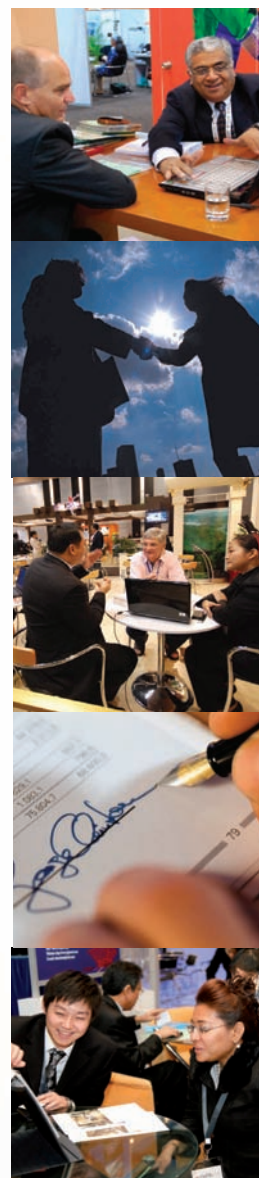
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High altitudes at lower costs

Budget carriers have established a strong foothold in Asia, reports **Sim Kok Chwee**

Low-cost carriers (LCCs) emerged a little more than a decade ago in Asia, but have quickly expanded from their home base to make **L**up for lost time.

Like their global counterparts, such as Southwest Airlines in the US and Ryanair in Ireland, their vision of what a pure LCC should be was clear at the start. AirAsia established units in Thailand and Indonesia and has since set its sights on Vietnam and the Philippines, while Tiger Airways expanded to Australia, the Philippines (through a collaboration with South East Asian Airlines, or SEAIR) and Thailand (through a tie-up with Thai Airways International). Australia's Jetstar Airways has also established a foothold in Singapore and Vietnam.

But along the way, some LCCs have drifted away from a purely LCC model and increasingly, the lines between LCCs and full-service carriers have blurred. Airlines on both sides of the divide have begun to leverage on unbundled services as a valuable revenue source. Baggage interlining arrangements are already in place between Air France-KLM and the Jetstar group of airlines. Virgin Australia has a codeshare agreement with Delta Airlines.

Still others have veered away from serving just point-to-point traffic. AirAsia launched its longhaul subsidiary, AirAsia X, which flies to Australia, North Asia, Europe and the Middle East. It has aggressive plans for further network expansion to North America. In addition to Airbus A330s and A340s, AirAsia X has also ordered Airbus A350s.

The successful longhaul operations of AirAsia X contrast starkly against other failed ventures by Oasis Hong Kong Airlines and Viva Macau. Other LCCs in Asia that are now defunct include Indonesia's Adam Air and Vietnam's Indochina Airlines.

The initial scepticism that greeted the birth of LCCs in Asia has since given way to a firmer recognition that these innovative and extremely mobile carriers are here to stay. At major hubs such as Singapore, LCCs now account for about 30 per cent of total passenger throughput.

The following is a snapshot of some of the LCCs in the-Asia Pacific region that have made their mark on the aviation landscape.

AirAsia	Tiger Airways	Jetstar Airways	Air Busan	Spring Airlines
Start of operations 2001 Main hub Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Current fleet AirAsia: 53 Airbus A320s (end-2010), Thai AirAsia: 19 Airbus A320s (end-2010) and Indonesia AirAsia: 18 A320s and B737-300s Aircraft on order 86 Airbus A320s (as of March 31) Offshore units Thai AirAsia, Indonesia AirAsia, Vietjet AirAsia, AirAsia Philippines (to start in 2011) Remarks Also owns AirAsia X, which operates longhaul LCC routes to Australia, Europe and within Asia. Passengers carried 16.1 million in 2010 Network Strong presence throughout South-east Asia, India and China.	Start of operations 2001 Main hub Singapore Current fleet 26 Airbus A320s, based in Singapore and Australia Aircraft on order 42 Airbus A320s to be delivered by end-2015 Offshore units Tiger Airways Australia, SEAir (planned 32.5 per cent stake), Thai Tiger Airways (planned 39 per cent stake) Remarks Tiger Airways has rigidly stuck to the purely LCC model and planned 41 per cent seat capacity growth in Northern Summer 2011, with increased operations to Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Chennai. Passengers carried Six million (fiscal year ending March 31, 2011) Network 36 destinations in 12 countries	Start of operations 2004 Main hub Melbourne, Australia Current fleet 44 Airbus A320s, six A321s, nine A330-200s Aircraft on order 13 A320s, nine A321s, four A330-200s, 15 B787-8s Offshore units Jetstar Asia Airways (Singapore), Jetstar Pacific (Vietnam) Remarks Became an affiliate member of the oneworld alliance in February. Also has interlining arrangements and commercial agreements with Qantas Airways, Finnair and Air France-KLM. Passengers carried 10.5 million on Jetstar Airways (domestic and international) and 2.1 million on Jetstar Asia Airways from July 2010 to March 2011 Network Extensive Australia, New Zealand and Asia coverage	Start of operations 2008 Main hub Busan, South Korea Current fleet Three Boeing 737-400s, three B737-500s, one Airbus A321 Aircraft on order One Airbus A321 Remarks Air Busan is a subsidiary of Asiana Airlines. Passengers carried Has exceeded three million since launch as of September 2010. Yearly figures are unavailable. Network Domestic services link Busan to Jeju and Seoul-Gimpo. International services link Busan to Osaka, Fukuoka, Taipei, Cebu and Hong Kong. Flights from Busan to Tokyo-Narita are planned for June 2011.	Start of operations 2005 Main hub Shanghai-Hongqiao, China Current fleet 22 Airbus A320s Aircraft on order Information not available Remarks One of the first private Chinese carriers, Spring Airlines is owned by Spring Travel, a dominant travel agency network in the Chinese market. Passengers carried No traffic statistics available, but Spring Airlines achieved a profit of US\$71 million in 2010. Network Aside from an extensive domestic network in China, Spring Airlines has been authorised to operate to Japan, South Korea, Russia and South-east Asia. It has launched international flights from Shanghai-Pudong to Hong Kong and Macau.

Low-cost carriers in the Asia-Pacific region

- Australia**
 - Jetstar Airways
 - Tiger Airways Australia
 - Virgin Australia (formerly Virgin Blue)
- China**
 - Juneyao Airlines
 - Spring Airlines
- Hong Kong**
 - Hong Kong Express
- India**
 - Air India Express
 - GoAir
 - IndiGo
 - JetLite
 - SpiceJet
- Indonesia**
 - Batavia Air
 - Indonesia AirAsia
 - Lion Air

- Wings Air**
- Japan**
 - Skymark Airlines (planning to launch LCC-style services on four routes starting October 2011)
 - Unnamed LCC based in Osaka-Kansai International Airport (a joint venture between All Nippon Airways and First Eastern Investment Group of Hong Kong)

- Malaysia**
 - AirAsia
 - AirAsia X
 - Firefly
 - MASwings
- Pakistan**
 - Airblue
- The Philippines**
 - Airphil Express
- Singapore**
 - Jetstar Asia
 - Tiger Airways
- South Korea**
 - Air Busan

- Eastar Jet**
- Jeju Air**
- Jin Air**
- T-way Airlines** (formerly Hansung Airlines)
- Sri Lanka**
 - Mihin Lanka
- Taiwan**
 - Far Eastern Air Transport

- Thailand**
 - Nok Air
 - One-Two-GO
 - Thai AirAsia
 - ThaiTiger Airways

- Vietnam**
 - Air Mekong
 - Jetstar Pacific
 - Vietjet AirAsia



Veranda High Resort Chiang Mai, now under Accor's MGallery collection

Moving up a notch

International offerings are adding pizzazz to Chiang Mai, reports **Sirima Eamtako**

Arrivals The northern city of Chiang Mai welcomed 2.8 million guests to its accommodation establishments last year, a 15.7 per cent jump over the previous year, according to data from Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MoTS).

Domestic visitors led the growth, climbing 20.8 per cent to 1.7 million. Foreign visitors increased by 8.8 per cent, with the top 10 markets being the US, Japan, France, Australia, the UK, Malaysia, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands and Singapore.

Chiang Mai's travel trade plans to grow regional markets, especially conferences and weddings from India. A fam trip for Indian agents in April was hosted by Thai Airways International (THAI) and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

Chennai-based Cox & Kings senior manager Anil Giri said the destination was gaining interest among repeat Indian visitors to Thailand.

NTO TAT's Chiang Mai office organised a roadshow to Mumbai and Chennai in India in February/March and it will participate in the Malaysian Associ-

ation of Tour and Travel Agents' fair in Kuala Lumpur in August. More roadshows and tradeshow are also planned for South Korea, Indonesia and Singapore.

Niche segments, such as golf and ecotourism, will also be developed in order to grow arrivals from existing markets, said Chalernsak Suranant, director of TAT Chiang Mai office.

His office will continue to stimulate more visits among Thai tourists, with a roadshow to the eastern provinces of Chon Buri and Rayong in July, as well as an emphasis on events marketing throughout the year.

With two new convention and exhibition centres coming up by late-2012 – one privately-owned, catering to meetings for up to 2,000 pax, and the other, a bigger government-built venue – efforts to attract MICE guests will also be intensified.

Events Arts extravaganza Chiang Mai Fest made its debut in April (see next page). Event organiser Earth Wind & Fire president Nannapas Krainara said the aim was to encourage longer stays during Songkran or the Thai New Year holiday, which normally lasts five days.



“Chiang Mai Fest will help to build the city's image as an upscale destination, complementing the existing range of upmarket hotels and attractions, and encouraging visitors to stay longer during Songkran Festival.”

Nannapas Krainara
President, Earth Wind & Fire
Chiang Mai Fest event organiser

To boost business during the low season from May to October, a new Chiang Mai Grand Sale campaign kicked off with a golf festival from May 1 to June 30. A food fair in July and a spa festival in August are also on the cards.

Sarawut Saetiao, president of the Chiang Mai Tourism Business Association, said the six-month campaign was expected to help fill half of available hotel rooms, which normally run at about 20 to 30 per cent occupancy during the period.

Separately, the city is also participating in TAT's Amazing Thailand Grand Sale 2011 from June 15 to August 15, dishing out discounts of up to 80 per cent.

Hotels MoTS data showed there were 447 hotels and 23,292 rooms in the city last year. According to the Thai Hotels Association, only a handful are four- and five-star properties. Room supply is expected to remain stable this year, although Chiang Mai is welcoming more hotel chains through rebranding. Accor roped in the 69-key Veranda High Resort Chiang Mai under its MGallery Collection from April 1. In the same month, the 85-key Khum Phaya Resort

and Spa came under the Centara Boutique Collection. Later this year, the Suriwongse Hotel will also become a 286-room Mövenpick property.

Established brands are also changing it up. ONYX Hospitality Group closed the 42-year, 158-room Amari Rincome on April 30. The hotel's 1.8-hectare site will be integrated into a larger redevelopment project, which will include a new 85-key Amari hotel and a lifestyle community mall, slated to open later next year.

Airlines Low-cost carrier Thai AirAsia launched Chiang Mai as its third hub in the country, after Phuket and Bangkok, with new daily direct flights to Singapore and Hat Yai starting January 24.

On the Bangkok-Chiang Mai route, Bangkok Airways boosted its frequency from four to five flights per day from March 27.

And in a bid to boost passenger numbers from India, THAI is offering one complimentary seat for every 15 seats booked throughout the year, except peak periods, said its Chennai office general manager, Pichet Laeietpiboon.



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Maikhao Dream Villa Resort and Spa, Phuket offers 22 exquisite pool villas in a romantic tropical setting on popular Phuket Island. Nestled on the northwest coast of the Island, the resort exudes unstinting grandeur in a tranquil and natural environment where the warm turquoise sea caresses the golden sand of Maikhao Beach.

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Test drive

Chiang Mai Fest



The city's new arts festival promises to be an event of international standard. *Sirima Eamtako* checks it out

WHY Chiang Mai, known as Thailand's 'Rose of the North', is where centuries-old Lanna traditions and modern Thai lifestyle coexist. To many, Chiang Mai is a must-visit during Songkran and Loy Krathong festivals as the city continues to celebrate them in their old forms, despite some sidetracking of late. While both events continue to be major draws, a breath of fresh air has come to Chiang Mai in recent years, with the emergence of chic and trendy accommodation and hangout venues. So when Earth, Wind & Fire invited me to witness the inaugural Chiang Mai Fest, billed as an international festival of art and entertainment, I happily accepted although I remained sceptical. Many "international events" in Thailand have turned

out to be too national, highlighting mainly local talents. **WHAT** The Chiang Mai Fest – Art, Music, Dance and Talent was launched at the Three Kings Monument plaza from April 8 to 10, comprising an art exhibition and stage performances. First impression counts, and the organiser captured that moment well. The opening ceremony, presided over by Chiang Mai governor Pannada Disakul, was done in style at the Chiang Mai Arts and Cultural Centre, located behind the plaza. Speeches were short, but informative. The ribbon cutting was also swift, but nonetheless ceremonious. The art exhibition held in the museum at the Chiang Mai Arts and Cultural Centre showcased a number of beautiful paintings and creative crafts by well-known Thai-based artists such as Pichai Nirandha and Eng-on Homsuwan. The highlight, however, was the evening performances, which were alive and kicking for three consecutive nights. I was moved




by the good mix of international and Thai singers and performers. It seemed most of the audience felt the same way, as they were singing along, clapping their hands, tapping their feet and even dancing. My favourite performers were from Viva, Thailand's first pop-opera voice band, which kept me glued to my seat as five good-looking Thai youngsters belted out classical opera numbers with a pop feel. Also hailing from Thailand were famous Thai pop artistes Nantida Kaewbuasai and Lanna Commins, and Bangkok Xylophone and Kamlai who

have earned worldwide reputation as unconventional Thai classical music bands. Raising the fest's international positioning were the 14-musician brass band Jigger Bigger from the Netherlands, guitarist Peter Vandemoortele from Belgium, cabaret vocalist Frans Bloem from the US and *koto* player Noriko Tsuboi from Japan. The venue was also professionally managed. Despite being a public space, provisions were made to prevent overcrowding by street food traders. Those who wanted a bite could still turn to hotels such as Mandarin Oriental



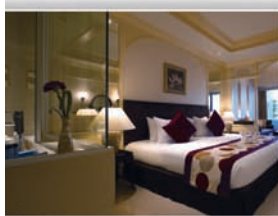
Name	Chiang Mai Fest
Rate	Free entry
When	The weekend before Songkran
Contact details	Earth, Wind & Fire Tel: (66-53) 292-224 Email: info@chiangmaifest.com www.chiangmaifest.com


Dhara Dhevi, Amari Rincome, Le Meridien, Holiday Inn and the Imperial Chiang Mai which were on hand to serve food and drink at affordable prices. **HOW** Mark your calendar as Chiang Mai Fest is set to be an annual affair. Package the trip for your client to arrive in the city about five days before Songkran as flights can be difficult to book during the three-day Thai New Year period. Fill up your client's day with sightseeing of Chiang Mai's innumerable historical and cultural attractions, as well as ecotourism and outdoor activities. Complement this with the festival's evening entertainment and conclude the trip with the famous water celebration. **VERDICT** A big round of applause for a job well done by Earth, Wind & Fire, which brought to life Chiang Mai's newest and must-see art and entertainment extravaganza.



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Checking in



Khum Phaya Resort & Spa, Centara Boutique Collection



Centara Hotels and Resorts' Boutique Collection has ballooned to 10 properties within a year of launch. *Sirima Eamtako* springs a visit on one of them

LOCATION A member of the Boutique Collection since October, the one-and-a-half-year resort is a 15-minute drive from the airport and 10 minutes away from the Night Bazaar and the old quarter. Nestled in lush landscaped grounds next to Khum Khantoke, a dinner and show venue, both premises boast exquisite design and architecture based on Lanna traditions and customs, which are close to the heart of owner Watchara Tantranont.

ROOMS Do ask for a Lanna Deluxe Pool Access room, especially if your client is a family with kids. There are 34 keys of this

room type on the ground floor, 46 rooms under Lanna Deluxe on the second floor, four Lanna Villas with private outdoor jacuzzis and one Royal Lanna Pool Villa. The first thing my teenage son did after entering our room was to walk out onto the terrace and plunge into the resort's lagoon-style swimming pool, which also has a children's area and three islets lined with sunloungers. I opted to sit and soak in the picturesque scenery, snapping away with my camera. Timber flooring and golden teakwood furnishings lend the room a cosy feel, further softened by white linen and canopy bed drapes. The strong Thai traditional design is toned down by a complete range of modern facilities, including a 32-inch LED TV with satellite channels and a fully-equipped minibar. What satisfied me the most was the noiseless individually controlled air-conditioning unit, which allowed me to sleep

The many layers and colours of ONYX

From humble Amari roots, Thai hotel group says it is on track with multi-brand expansion strategy

By Raini Hamdi

From the middle kingdom of four-star Amari, the top end, Saffron, and the base, Ozo, are sprouting at ONYX Hospitality.

Travel agents and hotel developers will get an idea of the homegrown chain's luxury hotel concept when its first luxury product, Oriental Residence Bangkok, opens in November this year. It will be the first luxury hotel to be managed by ONYX, although it does not carry the Saffron brand.

"Our owners are of the view that it is our responsibility to not let the Oriental name disappear (following the rebranding of The Oriental Bangkok, which they own, to Mandarin Oriental), hence the name Oriental Residence Bangkok," explained ONYX's president and CEO, Peter Henley.

The property has 145 luxury serviced residences and 46 privately-owned condo units in a 32-storey "iconic" building. Located on Wireless Road, the promise is "luxurious living space within a contemporary architectural space", said a media

release. It also boasts a signature restaurant featuring traditional Japanese robatayaki presented with a contemporary twist.

The property sets the scene for future Saffrons, being the visible showcase of ONYX's management capability in the upmarket segment.

A typical Saffron hotel, resort or residence is small (anything from 50 to 250 rooms). The minimum room size is 40m². There is always a signature dining experience, meeting facilities and other amenities such as a spa, a feature pool and a health club.

Henley said he was eyeing a Saffron in Mumbai and Shanghai. "Saffron should comprise 10 per cent of our portfolio (of 51 hotels in Asia-Pacific by 2018, the goal Henley set when he took over the role of CEO in 2008).

"Five to seven Saffron properties are about the right number. What is important is whether the opportunity is something which fits. The drivers of growth (in terms of numbers) will essentially still be Amari and Ozo," he said.

This month, ONYX is "cry-

talising" its economy brand concept, in time for the construction of the first Ozo, on Samui's Chaweng Beach, in the third quarter.

Ozo hotels and resorts are big on value but select on services, offering one F&B outlet,

in Singapore last week, said Ozo was not a budget hotel. "It has a more luxury fit-out, providing a four-star experience to guests. Someone who says he wants a budget hotel does not necessarily want a budget ex-



"It's a Holiday Inn product at a Holiday Inn Express price point."

Peter Henley

when asked to describe the positioning of ONYX's new economy hotel brand Ozo

meeting facilities and a pool only in resort locations.

Properties are also small, 50-200 rooms, with room sizes between 20 and 26m². Ozo's promise is to deliver basics well, such as a great sleep experience, breakfast and connectivity.

Simon Allison, ONYX's executive vice president and chief development officer, during a panel on budget hotels at the Hotel Investment Conference Asia-Pacific (HICAP) UPDATE

perience," Allison pointed out.

Cost per room excluding land costs is US\$70,000 to US\$100,000, he said.

Henley added as an indicator of where Ozo's position was in the budget/economy segment, the first Ozo in Samui, opening in 2012, would probably fetch a rate of 2,500 baht (US\$83) in today's market conditions. "It's a Holiday Inn product at a Holiday Inn Express price point," he quipped. In the pipeline are an

Ozo in Muscat and four Ozos in tertiary cities in India. Under negotiations are an Ozo in Hong Kong, which Henley said was in the "most advanced" stage, and in Shanghai, Colombo and Perth.

Meanwhile, the Amari brand is expanding outside Thailand with its first international footprint in the Maldives.

Amari Addu Maldives will open on November 1, in the southernmost atoll in the Maldives, featuring 271 villas.

The mid-to-upscale brand, the roots of ONYX, is being further improved. Amari Hua Hin, opening in 2012, will be the first Amari designed from ground up with the new look and feel of the brand. The resort will have 223 rooms and suites, and is part of a mixed-use development that features luxury condominiums.

Completing the multi-segment strategy, ONYX has also expanded into serviced apartments with two Amari Residences in operation in Bangkok (TTG Asia, April 29, 2011) and a further expansion of the Shama serviced apartment company which it acquired last October.



soundly. I was also quite amazed to see that such a small resort had spent considerable investment on the bathing experience: its bathtub comes with a jet bath system and its shower room is fitted with a jet steam shower, in addition to a rain shower head and normal shower.

F&B There are two F&B outlets in the resort, Kham Saen Restaurant and the Pool Bar. The restaurant was a little slow in serving lunch upon my arrival, but the food was good and the staff was apologetic. It also had an excellent breakfast buffet spread, offering a good mix of Thai and international dishes.

Neighbouring Khum Khantoke is a must-do dinner experience, especially for first-time visitors, for its northern Thai-style dishes and cultural show.

FACILITIES A free-form swimming pool, a fitness centre, SPA Cenvaree, an Internet corner, as well as complimentary daily shuttle services to key attractions such as the Night Bazaar and the Bhor Sang umbrella village.

For events, Hor Kham can hold a theatre-style meeting from 20 to 120 delegates.

Name Khum Phaya Resort & Spa, Centara Boutique Collection
No. of rooms 85
Rate From 2,650 baht (US\$88) until October 31 for Internet bookings
Contact details
Tel: (66-53) 415-555
Email: kpc@chr.co.th

Khum Khantoke can accommodate up to 800 guests indoors and 1,200 guests outdoors, and can host incentive groups. A Khum Kham convention and exhibition centre is also slated to open in December and will be able to accommodate a 2,000-pax meeting, a 1,500-pax banquet and a 100-booth exhibition.

SERVICE Rebranding GM Olivier Petit has done an excellent job of ensuring friendly and attentive service as part of the resort's transformation in the last six months. His predecessor, who is yet to be announced, will take over this month.

VERDICT A Centara-standard cosy boutique resort experience, with this particular property set in an exotic northern Thai-style ambience.

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A view of Taipei 101

Building its MICE charm

Taiwan is gearing up to trap more meetings while plugging supply gaps. By **Prudence Lui**

NTO Taiwan welcomed 5.6 million visitors in 2010, mainly from five source markets – China, Japan, Hong Kong/Macau, the US and Malaysia. Mainland Chinese visitors grew 68 per cent over 2009, with the trend expected to continue in 2011.

In February, the Taiwan Tourism Bureau launched its new brand, Taiwan: The Heart of Asia, which has since figured in various promotional campaigns for Taiwan's 100th anniversary this year. Initiatives include introducing 100 itineraries with 10 themes and offering affordable sightseeing shuttle bus services at tourist hotspots.

MICE Taiwan hosted 432 international meetings that drew 88,097 visitors last year, up from 233 meetings and 68,925 visitors in 2009.

Of these, 21 were successfully bidded for under the MICE Advancement Programme. Led by the Bureau of Foreign Trade under the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the programme consolidates all government and industry resources in support of event organisers. A dedicated team also actively bids for international

meetings, while backing this with marketing promotions.

Newly appointed Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bureau of Foreign Trade, director general, Cho Shih-chao, said: "We face several challenges in drawing MICE. For instance, our capacity is still limited, as the biggest venue in town is less than 100,000m².

"In response, the government has had the foresight to construct additional space in two neighbouring sites linked in one place. We are also trying to attract more international airlines to fly to Kaohsiung for the sake of more incentives groups."

He also noted that even with recent five-star additions, hotel supply still could not keep up with the recent upsurge of Chinese visitors.

Hotels International hotels in Taipei had an average occupancy of 76.6 per cent and average room rate of NT\$3,937 (US\$138) for January to March, compared to 72.5 per cent and NT\$3,765 respectively in the same period last year.

The capital city also saw the entry of Le Meridien Taipei and W Taipei in late-2010.

The former's senior sales and



"A dedicated MICE bureau is the road to the future, owing to the competitive environment. We are flexible and are partial to looking closely into it."

Cho Shih-chao
Director general
Bureau of Foreign Trade
Ministry of Economic Affairs

marketing director Paul Fu said cooperation between hotels was needed, citing a recent event where the 700 rooms needed were split among three hotels.

"We are working with our sister hotel, W Taipei, to take some MICE events," he said.

About 13 tourist properties totalling 3,000 rooms and with meeting facilities are expected to be completed across Taiwan before 2012. These include the 300-room Mandarin Oriental Taipei, 800-room Green Island Resort in Taitung, 308-room Ding Hotel in Kaohsiung, 250-room Hyatt Taichung and 260-room Lien Hotelat Hualien.

By 2015, Taipei will also have an international five-star, 1,000-room hotel at the TWTC Nangang Exhibition Hall.

Airlines Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport's (TPE) NT\$300-billion upgrade and expansion have been approved. Included are the new Terminal 3, costing NT\$60 million, renovation of two existing terminals and the establishment of a transportation network, all to be completed in 2018.

TPE passenger and cargo flights are expected to double by

2030 because of cross-strait direct flights.

Last year also saw the wrapping up of renovations at downtown Taipei International Airport (Songshan Airport) Terminal 1, which started handling international flights on March 29.

Far Eastern Air Transport resumed flights in April after being grounded for two years due to financial difficulties. Although it currently offers only Taipei-Kinmen flights, plans to expand services to Kaohsiung, Magong and even Siem Reap, Cambodia have been reported. EVA Air has also announced it would run twice-weekly services to Guam from June 18.

Access The completion of the Nangang Eastern Extension has shortened travel times for Nangang exhibition visitors, allowing them to reach downtown Taipei in 18 minutes.

Another infrastructure development in southern Taiwan is poised to turn Dapeng Bay in Pingtung into a site for yacht harbouring and international racing activities. Taiwan's first movable bridge was inaugurated there in March, making the area accessible by large sailboats.

Products

A little something for everyone



Shangrila Leisure Farming

Shangrila Leisure Farming

What The 17-hectare Shangrila Leisure Farming on Mt Dayuan, about 250m above sea level, was transformed from a rural farmland into a recreational farm in 2002.

Owner Chang Ching-lai, who inherited the farm from his parents, came up with the leisure farm concept that turned the former fruit orchard into a vacation resort. The property offers 106 suites, dining service and on-site activities aimed at preserving traditional farming culture and rural folk customs.

Apart from fruit picking, mountain-eering training, forest baths, tea appreciation and stargazing, indoor and outdoor incentive programmes, such as making sticky rice balls and traditional wishing lanterns, are also available. There are also meeting facilities for up to 150 people, theatre-style.

Contact

www.shangrilas.com.tw
Email: s515736@ms33.hinet.net
Tel: (88-6) 3951-1456



King Car Whisky Distillery

King Car Whisky Distillery

What World-famous Taiwanese whisky distiller Kavana picked Yilan for its distillery operations to leverage on the county's crystal-clear spring water.

Visitors can go on guided tours here at Taiwan's only free whisky distillery, open to the public year-round. Tours include a visit to the production line and sampling of whiskies. Up to 200 people per tour can be accommodated every day, from 10.00 to 20.00. English-speaking guides are available upon request. Visitors must be aged eight and above.

Contact

www.kingcar.com.tw
Tel: (88-6) 3922-9000 Ext 1104

Guang Xing Farm

What The Guang Xing Farm in Yilan, run by the Tsang family, makes learning

fun. What was once a pig farm has now been turned into a place where tourists can experience farm life.

A highlight is its earth oven, which guests are encouraged to experiment with. Other activities include guided farm tours, animal feeding and cycling.

Contact

www.pigs.com.tw
Tel: (88-6) 3951-3236

Silks Place Yilan hotel

What Opened in 2008, the 193-room property is the first and only five-star hotel in Yilan, and is owned by Formosa International Hotels Corporation.

Occupying the sixth through 11th floors of Luna Plaza, the largest shopping centre in eastern Taiwan, the hotel has fast become a hotspot of entertainment and leisure.

Silks Place Yilan is able to host MICE, with its international conference facilities that include a ballroom, four multi-functional meeting rooms and over 6,020m² outdoor space for weddings. Maximum capacity for indoor banquet is 100 tables.

It also has the Wellspring Spa, equipped with private spa rooms and individual villas.

Contact

www.silksplace-yilan.com.tw
Tel: (88-6) 0393-51000



Silks Place Yilan hotel

Turtle Island

What The island derives its name from its shape. Located off the north-east coast of Yilan, this 2.8m² marine landmark is definitely worth the trip.

Formerly a restricted military area, it was made a part of Taiwan's Northeast Coast National Scenic Area in 1999 before it was eventually renamed as the Turtle Island Village in 2000.

Apart from the sea-eroded caves, special cliff vegetation and rich marine ecology, it is also a good place to watch whales, dolphins and schools of fish.

Only 250 people are allowed to visit Turtle Island per day, so tourist groups are advised to apply 15 days before their visit and mail their application to the Tali station of the Northeast Coast National Scenic Area Administration.

Arrival time is between 9.00 and 15.00, and visitors have to leave the island before 16.00.



Turtle Island

Yilan's main draw

Nature is a big crowd-pleaser, reports **Prudence Lui**

The pristine county of Yilan on the north-eastern coast of Taiwan is proving to be a magnet for both leisure and MICE tourism, thanks to its improved accessibility and an explosion of hotel offerings.

Based on government statistics, it recorded 4.2 million tourists in 2010, up from 3.2 million in 2008.

This rise may be credited in part to the 12.9km Hsuenshan Tunnel. Taiwan's longest tunnel, opened in 2006, has shortened travel time between Taipei and Yilan from two hours to just 40 minutes.

Nature-related activities, like leisure farming, whale watching and hot and cold springs, have also fuelled the appeal.

"Apart from lakes, rivers and farmlands, we can also boast of our cold spring, which is only one out of the existing two in the world," said Tammy Chien, marketing manager of Shangrila Leisure Farming, which sees 40 per cent of its guests hailing from South-east Asia.

Medical tourism has also been a good selling point. Chien said: "We have done wellness tours for awhile, but have also recently tapped into medical tourism, given the trend. By partnering with local hospitals, we are able to offer packages to up-market travellers, with options like health checks and cosmetic treatments. China is a key market."



Courtesy of Lin Ming Ren/Yilan County Government

According to the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, three tourist hotels are in the pipeline in anticipation of Yilan's expected tourism growth – the 193-room Sheraton Yilan Resort, scheduled to open at the end of 2011, followed by the 146-room Shangri-La Resort and the 99-room Ocean International in 2012.

In terms of MICE, the county successfully won the 2012 FAI-CIVL Plenary Meeting. Though small, the event assembles 160 delegates from 90 countries.

Jason Yeh, CEO of GIS Group, a Taipei-based professional congress organiser, is hoping that a dedicated convention and exhibition facility will be built next to the existing National Center for Traditional Arts to accommodate future events. "Nobody doubts Yilan's potential. We also anticipate more star-graded hotels," he said.



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